colossus

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Five Nights at Freddy's

Relationships:
Glamrock Freddy & Gregory (Five Nights at Freddy's), Glamrock Freddy & Gregory & Vanny | Reluctant Follower | Beta-Tester, Montgomery Gator & Glamrock Chica & Glamrock Freddy & Roxanne Wolf (Five Nights at Freddy's), Michael Afton & Vanny | Reluctant Follower | Beta-Tester, Moon & Sun (Five Nights at Freddy's)

Characters:
Glamrock Freddy (Five Nights at Freddy's), Gregory (Five Nights at Freddy's), Vanny | Reluctant Follower | Beta-Tester, Vanessa A. | Ness

Additional Tags:
Everybody is here, not gonna tag everybody but every major character shows up, Five Nights at Freddy's: Security Breach, Protective Freddy Fazbear, Fist Fights, Fluff and Angst, Hurt/Comfort, no injury in the first chapter but can't say it doesn't happen in the second, Father-Son Relationship, fazdad, Canon divergence (?), van also gets adopted by freddy just letting you know, twin gremlins, maybe a bit ooc, i basically redid three endings an put them into one to make it more interesting and coherent, and also happier lol, everybody say thank you to sun, freddy is literally so fun to write lol, pov shifts kinda sorta, there's narrative parallels to previous characters but don't listen to matpat he's full of shit, Found Family, afton curses a lot, yeah the animatronics get their redemption arc, felt like the afton fight was underwhelming so i tried to make it more interesting, the blob is just a lovecraftian monster waiting to happen, if this is inaccurate in

a couple months i deeply apologize and i will not be re-writing any of this, fun fact: this series is almost as long as the great gatsby is! what!, Vanessa A. | Ness and Vanny | Reluctant Follower | Beta-Tester are the Same Person

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Part 4 of Stranger In Us All

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by littleleaflings

Summary

Gregory and Freddy are now at their last crossroads, with their final foes blocking their way. Freddy makes a choice.

throat of the creature

Chapter Summary

Vanny antagonizes them at Fazer Blast. Sun reminds Freddy of his kindness. Freddy fights back, but not in the way he expects.

Chapter Notes

maybe i... am a writer, based solely on how long this is, lol

See the end of the chapter for more notes

—

The return to Parts and Service is arduous.

As the turn of the hour inches ever closer, so does the pressing sensation of eyes on Freddy and Gregory's every movement.

The mall has fallen silent, no longer flooded with alarms and clangs of heavy feet, all save for his own. It remains deserted, as it should be, as the bear and his cub plod to the stage, the lift awaiting them.

The Daycare Attendant is, as well.

Throughout the night, Moon has been the only one that's managed to escape most of the carnage. Their body lurches as they click, red eyes vibrant, flinging themselves upwards into the rafters when they hear Freddy's heavy footsteps.

"Hello, Mister Fazbear!" Moon calls out, Freddy tensing at the tone of their voice. *Just as malicious as the others.* At least they seem to have better sense, staying out of the way—and it makes them very, very dangerous. "Daybreak is close at hand, is it not?"

"Spare us your goodbyes, Moon," Freddy snaps, at his wits end. The closer they get to 6 AM, the more desperate he has become. "I'm sure we would appreciate it far more if you left us to our own devices."

"I've seen what you have done." Moon spits. "I've seen it *all*—what a daring duo you two are, breaking apart your friends left and right!"

Freddy doesn't have anything to say to that. They aren't wrong. He can claim all that he likes that it is justified, that he was left with no other option, but it isn't the entire truth, obscured by his protocol and protectiveness.

He pushes towards the stage, anyway, Gregory clutching onto Freddy's fingers, not wanting to escalate the encounter any further.

"You reek of *betrayal."* Moon shakes their head, shadow pressing against the ceiling. "I am sure not all will end well for you when the time comes for the staff to see you as you are now. Besides, there is still time for you to redeem yourself. If you give the boy up, I'm sure

all will be forgiven."

"You already know my answer, Moon." Freddy growls, pulling Gregory on the stage, huddling over him as the boy presses the button. The lift whirrs to life, just as Moon does, tutting and waving a finger at them.

"Your choice, then!" Moon scuttles in the crossbars, steps fervent as he moves towards them. "If you wish to become a heap of metal in a scrap yard, be my guest!"

The top of the lift closes. There's a clang against it, and Gregory exhales, brow furrowed as they head down.

"What was that about?"

"It seems they were attempting to barter." Freddy shakes his head. "When we finish here, we will go up Roxy's elevator and go through Rockstar Row. It is farther from the entrance, but Moon will likely stay around the atrium, as they do not know about the other elevators."

"Okay." Gregory leans on Freddy's side, the bear looping his arm around him to hold him close. The boy sinks into his touch, haggard and exhausted, adrenaline leaving him now that they're in relative safety.

He tries not to let Moon's words get to him, but it is near impossible not to think about—not as they lower themselves in the elevator, not when they walk into the hall and into the main room, not when Freddy straps himself into the chair and Gregory readies the machine.

Not when he knows he has stolen Chica's voice, Monty's hands, and now, Roxy's eyes.

They feel unnatural on his endoskeleton, the weight unfamiliar, clunky and not fit for his shape. Monty's claws are too long, and Chica's voice warps his own, her voice a low undertone every time he speaks.

It’s constant, and as he leans back, the protective cylinder shuts its doors. Gregory pilots the mechanical arms, placing the eyes on a tray —Freddy forces himself to look away and *focus,* to be *as still as possible* as Safe Mode shuts off.

"Gregory," Freddy murmurs as the machine tugs off his ears and metal casing on his face, bare endoskeleton exposed. Gregory gulps at the sight, then lightly slaps his cheeks, focusing on Freddy's next words: "I know you do not want me to pry into your affairs, but... I have not forgotten anything you have told me tonight, and I would like to know what you meant by—"

"—of course you'd ask that." Gregory mumbles, Freddy's voice box stuttering as he quiets down. "You're just as stubborn as I am, and that's saying something."

"Well, regardless, I am not demanding information from you." Freddy stills his face as one of his eyes is disconnected, Gregory's face swimming in and out of view as he moves the machine. "I would just like to know."

Like where the cut was from on Gregory's cheek, which had been there the moment Freddy pulled him from his hatch. Like his dirty clothes, the ease at which he was able to hide, the fact he has no parents to call and is in no database Freddy's searches can scrounge up.

It all adds up to a conclusion Freddy *isn't* able to dismiss, and can only do so if his boy would tell him.

Gregory plucks his other eye out, quiet. Freddy's system is too delicate for him to do much of anything but sit and wait, for either a refusal or an admission.

It doesn't take long to finally, after all this time, get the latter.

"I'm homeless."

Freddy starts, registering the information, and lets the boy go on, even as his voice box sinks into his stomach hatch.

"I don't have—" Gregory fumbles, sighing, "—I don't have anywhere to go. Not anymore, not unless I go back to my foster family, and—and they used me like a *doll,* not a kid, and it started getting really bad when I wouldn't play along—so I ran away." He swallows, hanging his head. "I got *greedy* when I came in here, through a vent, during the day, thinking that a place running with other kids would mean security would be too focused on them and not *me."* The automated voice rings out as Gregory carefully slides one of Roxy's eyes in, Freddy's system recalibrating as it adjusts. "Turns out, not everybody was fooled by me, just 'cause I'm a kid. I ended up getting chased and had to hide in Lost and Found—that's why I knew how to get out of there so quickly."

The other eye slides in. Freddy blinks, buttons flashing as Gregory mashes them through the process, wires snapping back into place. His face is red, like it does when he's agitated, and his eyes are glassy.

"...that's how Vanessa caught me. I was snooping through her stuff and found a diagram for some kind of weird rabbit costume, and then she came in. She yelled at me and—and I had to run away." Gregory wipes at his face with the back of his hand. "I—I didn't want to tell you. I don't know why, but I just—I didn't want you to know."

"That you do not have a home?"

Gregory swallows. The machine clicks Freddy's casing back into place, the automated voice cutting off the moment the door to the cylinder opens.

"Yeah." His boy steps back as Freddy sits up in his seat, hands gripped into fists. His knuckles are white, and he seems petrified, like he's been caught in a lie. "Yeah, I don't have one of those."

For a moment, they sit in silence.

Then, carefully, Freddy leans over, putting a hand on his shoulder. Gregory shakes, and sighs in relief as Freddy tugs him onto his lap in a fierce hug.

"I understand why you did not tell me." Freddy presses his nose to Gregory's forehead, and his shaking eases, if only a little. "Please know that I am not angry with you. You have—you have endured *so much,* at such a young age, and I—I am so sorry, Gregory."

How can he let this boy slip out of his hands?

Freddy knows he can't leave the Pizzaplex. He knows his internal generator can only keep him going for a short period of time when his

battery runs dry. He's still on low–power mode, a system he can't turn off himself, and even if he wasn't, he would still struggle after two hours.

If Gregory is living on the streets, *alone,* he needs someone he can *rely* on, not a chunk of metal and plastic who would draw attention to them, not something that happens to be state–of–the–art technology, and not something that is nothing but programming and protocol.

But Freddy doesn't *care.* He doesn't care about regulations, or rules, or even his own self–preservation. Not anymore, not when it's all been thrown to the gutters for Gregory, who is the best thing that's happened to him since he was created, since Bonnie was torn asunder, since his friends lost control of themselves to the mall's machinations.

He doesn't want to give him up. He doesn't want to stay stuck here, dealing with the aftermath, watching his friends forget what happened as they're reset and fixed. He knows Vanessa will do her best to get management to give Freddy the boot, and override his entire system. The only reason she has not done so already is that she's been holding off, and Freddy may not know the reason, but it's *terrifying.*

"I know you're sorry." Gregory's voice is tight with unshed tears. "I just —I wanted to be a kid, for once."

"I know." That fierce protectiveness rears its head again—how dare they, how *dare* Gregory's parents leave their boy behind, how *dare* they abandon the child they brought into the world, and, of all children, they abandon Gregory?—and he sinks his nose further into Gregory's hair, motors hissing enough steam to move some of the strands. "You have not done anything wrong."

"T-the worst part is," Gregory whispers, "is that I... I didn't care, I guess, for a while. I got used to it. Running around on my own. And—

and now I—" Something fragile trembles through him, and Freddy keeps his grip firm, reminding him he isn't alone anymore. "—I have *you."*

Freddy shuts his new eyes tightly, his circuits overflowing with the weight of his boy's words.

"And I don't wanna go." Gregory's shoulders shake at the force he's exerting to try and hold back his tears. "I don't wanna leave you, and have to go back out there, when I *know* something bad is gonna happen to you, and when I–I finally—" A sob wrenches out of him anyway. "—I finally have *somebody."*

Damn the consequences.

He doesn't care about his shelter any longer—if the Pizzaplex is what is between him and Gregory, the whole place can go up in flames.

"You do." Freddy soothes. "I am here for you. Now, and forever."

Gregory melts into his touch, then. Freddy does his best to brush his hair with his claws, untangling the sweat-soaked curls.

"We gotta start moving again," Gregory murmurs, cheek still warm on Freddy's chest. "We're 15 'til."

The looming deadline of Gregory's escape hangs on them both. The boy wants to leave as soon as he is able to, but doesn't want to leave Freddy behind, and Freddy doesn't want to be separated from him. Not with a bond like this.

He stifles a shudder at the thought of his memories being completely wiped. Of forgetting the boy still cradled in his arms, like a lifeline, like a glimpse into humanity he had before only seen in the corner of his vision, now staring him straight in the face.

He can't allow that to happen. He's not sure how he's going to leave, and he still has to calculate the consequences, but he wants to. He feels disconnected from the others, now, as much as it *hurts*.

Gregory has other plans.

When the boy raises his head, he bites his lip, before slipping a hand in his pocket.

"When I went into Lost and Found, I also found this." Gregory pulls out a crumpled piece of newspaper. The headline, in bold letters, makes Freddy's fans whirr in alarm: NINE MISSING CHILDREN is all he needs to see before his circuits twist in knots.

"Freddy, do you know how many other kids have gone missing, or stayed after hours?"

"No," Freddy's ears droop, "Chloe is the only one I am certain of."

Certain of. How often have his memories been tampered with, his systems forcefully rebooted? A handful of times? Ten, twenty, thirty? Hundreds?

He isn't even sure if he's the original Freddy for this location. If his

casing had been pressed onto a different endo, because of his previous incarnate's failures.

He wonders what will happen to him if he is forced to stay. All of the animatronics will have to be repaired, and Freddy's stolen upgrades will be given back to their rightful owners, but Vanessa had promised him that any evidence leading him to having protected the boy would get him replaced.

There is an easier way for you to prevent such a thing happening, his system supplies. *You fight your way out, just as you have been doing this whole time.*

If you don't, they'll take Gregory away, and you'll be on your own again.

His frown deepens.

"Chloe?"

"She was a child who hadn't been picked up yet near closing time." He stands, still carrying Gregory, his boy leaning to the old computer to finish the procedure. "It was back when... when Bonnie was still around. She had gotten lost and needed our help to contact the main office."

He remembers her. Small, much like Gregory, eyes wide and frightened, talking of a *thing* in the deepest underground of the complex. He remembers Bonnie patting her back, raising a brow at Freddy, and the bear shaking his head in confusion as they both tried to reassure her.

He remembers Bonnie slipping into Monty Golf not long after that, wanting to find the place she had been speaking of.

He remembers.

"Oh." Gregory finishes at the console command, still holding the newspaper. His face tightens. "Is... is she—"

"She is not there, no." Freddy reassures, scanning the faces of each and every child on the paper. Some of them are matches, and some are completely unfamiliar. With how events are handled at the Pizzaplex, and how large the facility is, it isn't a surprise—with only five animatronics, and only four being able to roam, Freddy is only able to be at one place at a time.

Every failed match from his memory feels as though it's a brand against his casing regardless.

"However, I will say, considering these are all in the area..." Freddy's motors hum as he sets Gregory down, the boy having become restless in his arms. "... it would not surprise me if they were all connected to this place. The company has a... certain history."

"Ain't that the truth. How are your new eyes?"

Freddy clenches his hands at his sides, turning his new eyes to the side. He's briefly taken aback by a thermal outline of something, but realizes it's just a deactivated endoskeleton. Right.

Roxy's eyes.

"I am having a hard time adjusting. I can see movement through the walls." Freddy blinks, taken aback by the sudden overwhelming sensation as his vision finally updates. When he looks at Gregory, he can see his heat signature, and the brightness of his gaze. "You look... different to me."

"What's that supposed to mean?"

"I can more easily see you are trying to hide a smile." Gregory forces his face to complete neutrality at his words, and Freddy barks out a soft laugh.

"Not fair!"

"I assure you, I will take *great glee* in using this to my advantage."

Gregory pouts, and sharply turns his head, before his face falls.

"... but... aren't you going to have to stay behind?"

"Gregory." Freddy bends down and holds out his hand for his boy to take. When Gregory obliges him, Freddy squeezes it. "I would not say that just yet. For now, we must focus on the present. We have yet to get you out of here."

"You're right." Gregory nods his head, resolute. "We're not done here, anyway."

"What do you mean?"

"There's gotta be a reason a bunch of kids are all disappearing." Gregory bites his lip as he traces one of the children's faces on the newspaper. "I bet it's the rabbit doing it. Maybe—maybe you can see her now, with your new eyes!"

Freddy considers it, and nods. "That would likely be the best case scenario. However, are you not worried about disappearing, if she is the cause of it?"

"No. Well, yes? It's..." Gregory sighs. "It's because I'm worried now that, if the disappearances keep happening here, then... then it'll be shut down, and you'll be dragged off for scrap."

Freddy blinks. "What?"

"Well, at first I didn't care." Gregory sniffs, rubbing his nose with his arm. "I mean, it sucks that kids are disappearing, and I don't want to be one of them—but I grabbed the newspaper because..." He sighs, hiding his face with one hand. "Well, I was going to use it to threaten her that, if another kid disappeared, especially when they're seen at the restaurant, the place will get shut down. I thought it was my only way out—and then I kept it because, after I met you..."

Gregory looks up at him, eyes big. "I... I don't want that, not anymore. I want them to *stop,* so you don't end up—you can just be *safe* like before I came here."

"Gregory." Freddy shakes his head, smiling wistfully. "You need not worry about such things. If your hunch is correct, we can deal with the problem directly, while testing your theory, yes?"

"Yeah." Gregory nods fiercely, nose wrinkling. "Besides, I think there might be a way to make the rabbit come out. I keep getting messages from different security stations, and I've found a bunch of stuff all night, and—and they talk about some weird arcade cabinets."

"What?"

"I played the first one, when we were in the Raceway. There was a back exit out of the information building, and I went into the salon to look around, and found it." That explains why Gregory had been gone so long when they investigated the area—Freddy had been meaning to ask, but with everything happening, it had slipped his mind.

"But, I have to go back to the arcade to play the second one." Gregory shivers. "It's about a princess—she's trapped in the dark, and there are weird bunny shadows everywhere, and—and it's all *weird."*

"And you believe she has something to do with this?"

"I know she does." Gregory slams his fist in his palm. "I just need to play the second game, and find where the third one is, and maybe—maybe she'll stop."

It is not much, but it is a lead. If Gregory is this steadfast, I will listen to him. "That will take some time–are you certain you do not want to leave, superstar?"

"Not until I figure this out." Gregory smiles up at him, wobbly but comforting all the same. "I want to make sure, when I leave, that nothing bad will happen to you."

"Gregory…"

"We gotta hurry." His boy moves towards the elevators, tugging Freddy along. The bear could stay in place, if he so desired, but he has no choice but to give in, even if he is unsure of the logistics behind such an endeavor. "Besides, we still have to get through Fazer Blast."

"That is true." They clamber inside, Gregory charging his flashlight as he does so. "What do you want to do?"

"I wanna separate, at least for now." When Freddy's face hardens at his words, Gregory backtracks. "Not for long! I promise!"

"The last time we were separated, Roxy almost got a hold of you. If I had decided to recharge in one of the party garages, she very well would have had you caught when you tried to go into the lobby of the raceway."

"Yeah, I know." Gregory groans as the same chiming theme plays in the elevator. "But you need to get charged—you're at 20 percent, Freddy, and there's no way I'm risking a malfunction or you getting stranded somewhere because I let you chase after me."

He's right. Freddy restrains himself from staying something unkind in frustration–this low power mode is a pain in his servos. "Yes, I *suppose.* However, I will move from station to station to stay as close to your location as possible."

"You'll just lose whatever charge you got if you do that!" Gregory rebukes, pulling his camera from his duffle. Freddy opens his mouth to retort—it is better than not charging at all, or being on the opposite

side of the mall when Gregory could risk getting attacked—but Gregory's stern expression forces him to stop in his tracks. "Please, Freddy. I know I messed up big time. I know you can't enter into the arcade–not with that weird programming bug. But I'm not gonna be there long, and I'll meet up with you at Fazer Blast, okay?"

He doesn't have many options, does he? Nothing about that has changed.

"I will recharge to the closest station to the elevator."

"Yeah, I know."

"If anything happens, you call upon me, regardless or not if my programming bug causes any issues."

"Freddy–"

"–please." Freddy wills himself to keep his tone steady. "Please, I do not like being away from you for very long."

Gregory sighs. "Okay." A beat, before he speaks again. "I'd bring you to the arcade if I could, you know."

Although the words do little to soothe the blipping on his vision, alerts screaming at him that it's a terrible idea, Freddy brushes a hand through his boy's curls, Gregory's eyes rolling.

"I know. Thank you." He says, as cheerfully as he can muster, the elevator opening with a ding. "I will see you very soon, superstar.

Keep to the walls, and if you need anything, anything at all–"

"Got it!" Gregory slips from his grasp, smiling over his shoulder. Freddy's motors hiss, and the bear steps out, Gregory tucking himself into the nearest vent. "Don't worry about me, okay? I can do this."

"I know you can." Freddy's ears flick as Gregory disappears into the dark. Quietly, Freddy mumbles, "I am fully aware."

Back to being alone again.

It is awkward, trudging through Roxy's room. She hasn't yet come back to it yet, but the place is cluttered, make-up stashed in heaps on her desk. There's a picture of the four of them in the corner next to a hoard of lights and cameras, and his mouth presses in a frown.

Chica is balancing on one foot, elegant as she presses her face to Freddy's shoulder, winking. Monty has an arm slung over the other, pointing to the camera, sunglasses low on his face so his amber eyes are visible. Roxy is laughing, hugging Monty's waist, head poking out between his arm and torso.

He is in the center, eyes shining with blue light, grin wide as he raises his arm in a wave.

Freddy drags his gaze over it, this vestige of normality, of what he has always known and is now forever altered. He cannot, will not, and *refuses* to let himself be consumed by it.

He forces his body to move, before he commits the past to memory, before his grief wells up too much for him to control.

When he steps out into the main hall, he immediately can tell something is wrong.

His suspicions are all but confirmed as a voice from above startles him, freezing in place.

“Oh! Finally! You’re alone!”

Freddy snaps his head up as he peers into the ceiling. He first sees a beam of light, the movement of their hands, then their feet, and the glint of yellow as the glow of Freddy’s eyes hit them just right, enough to make them out.

It's *Sun,* clutching a spare flashlight, pointing it towards their face.

“I was worried I wouldn’t get my chance!” Sun is grinning, clapping their hands together as well as they are able to, grabbing their wire.

“You!”

“You’ve torn apart your friends, Mister Fazbear,” The attendant chirps, bells jingling as they step from bar to bar. “And it’s such a shame!”

“What are you doing out?” Freddy glares up at the rafters, setting his shoulders. “The hour has not yet changed, and Moon—"

"—Moon gave me control, thinking I would be better off speaking to

you then them! Especially with the boy not around, considering how… *defensive* you can be."

What an understatement, Freddy thinks glumly.

Sun waves their flashlight, before elaborating. “I’ve also had to adjust some settings to be able to free-roam, and I did not gather enough information to come to you until now.” The daycare attendant’s eyes gleam warmly in the dark, lighting their path with every step. “Your new friend may be banned from the Daycare, but I’ve been keeping tabs on the two of you, when I can.”

“Wait, you have known this whole time?” Freddy’s ears flick, eyes narrowing. “That I have been–”

“Protecting the boy?” Sun flaps their arms. “Of course I know! It’s hard to miss when you’re paying attention. I knew from the moment I saw you at the doors when I forced the boy to leave! Besides, Moon’s memory tells me everything.” Sun’s head lowers, putting a hand to their face. “I have been searching for clues! Things you do not know about, about what’s been going on, and I’m here to help!”

“You expect me to trust you?” Freddy’s body tenses as the other animatronic shifts their weight, their wires flashing as they swing down. “You both have been following the boy, too. Why should I listen to anything you say?”

“Because I’ve seen *everything,* just as Moon has*,”* Sun lands on the ground, graceful as they amble behind the bear, Freddy's head swerving to keep his yellow gaze focused on them. “Please don’t misunderstand my intentions, too! You’ve become quite the mean bear, haven’t you?”

“I–” Freddy grimaces, ears folding. “–I am doing what I must.”

“No, no, *no!”* Sun shakes their head, wiggling a finger as they step in front of the bear, poking at his nose. “That’s what you’ve made yourself *believe!* Have you not considered *why* the others are acting this way?”

“It is a glitch.” Freddy’s snout twitches. “Just like your system suffers from, when the lights are off.”

“I’m well aware.” Sun’s head whirrs as it turns, arms outstretched. “That’s why I have no time to waste! I have figured out the source of the glitch!”

“What?”

“You seem to not have been paying much attention,” Sun tuts, “but I will remedy that! With your new eyes, you should be able to see the one you seek.”

“I do not want to hear a *riddle,* attendant,” Freddy’s fingers flex as he puts a hand on his hatch, willing his servos to stop overheating. “I would much rather be spared from such things.”

“How little fun you are! You are supposed to be quite nice, aren’t you?”

“Please.” Freddy shuts his eyes tight. “Please, if there is a way for me to rid them of this harmful influence, tell me.”

For a moment, there is silence, as Sun weighs Freddy's words.

Then, a gentle hand pats the bear's head, Sun giggling when Freddy's jolts.

"It is the white rabbit," Sun hums. "Dearie me, she's worse than you! Jumpy, jumpy, jumpy!"

"... *that* rabbit?" The bear leans back, eyes widening. "The one that's been following Gregory?"

"Yup!" Sun puts emphasis on the pop of the 'p', bowing with flourish. "The boy has told you, has he not?"

"Yes, he has. Is she–"

"Yes, yes, our security guard has a well kept secret that she's been hiding from us!" Sun rolls their head again, circling around the bear. "She calls herself Vanny, and has infected all systems in the building, with a special focus on you four!"

"So Vanessa *is* the rabbit." Freddy sets his jaw. "Then why am I unaffected? Is it from when I was on stage?"

"Seems like it!" Sun twirls in a pirouette, grabbing Freddy's hand, the bear jerking with the movement. "Your system denied her protocol, just like mine did! However, it has infected the rest of us, including poor Moon—with me being left to my own devices, I had to do

something to help the boy escape, once I realized something was wrong." Freddy dares to smile at the words, relief seeping into his features. Sun grins back, bolstered by his rise in spirits.

"So Vanessa is truly the root of all of this?" Freddy tilts his head, wondering. "But why? Why would she do such a thing?"

"That, I am unsure about." Sun taps their finger to their chin. "However! I am sure that, if you are going to confront her, when she comes to you—open your heart."

"I—" Freddy's insides twist. "Open my heart?"

"I know you have taken in the boy as your own." Sun laments. "I'm sure you would not have been the only one, had we not been infected. It's a tragedy, I say, how things have gone—and how afraid you both have been." The attendant droops, arms wrapping around themselves. "We are not ourselves. The virus has gotten worse over the past few hours, and I come to you, in our hour of need, as the only one capable of doing so, to remind you—we are your *friends."*

Freddy lowers himself, hand hesitating as he ghosts it over Sun's shoulder.

He hasn't forgotten. Regret bubbles up inside his throat, welling like oil.

When he finally holds it, the attendant's morose expression lightens, if only a little bit.

“I know.” Freddy whispers. “I know. I have done… horrible things.”

“You are in an atypical situation.” Sun reminds him. “There is no protocol for this! I know Officer Vanessa holds the access code to the backdoor of the virus, which will free us from this dreadful thing.”

“And I…” Freddy nods. “I must open my heart to set you all free?”

“Yes.” Sun pats Freddy’s hand, pulling away to stand straight. “I believe she will open her heart, in return. Something has made her afraid, just as you have been, and just as the little one is.” There is true strength in their tone, optimism shining through. “That fear has clouded everyone’s judgement. I hope I have cleared the air, somewhat, as I know it is necessary for things to change.”

“I am sorry that you have had to remind me.”

“Don’t be, Mister Fazbear.” Sun grabs their wire, and waves. “Do your very best. She is in the only place you haven't been yet—your home territory, in fact! I’ll make sure to keep the other animatronics at bay while you go to your final destination. Bye, now!”

And up the attendant goes, flying back into the rafters, leaving Freddy behind to consider their guidance.

When Freddy opens his hand, he finds a single candy in the center of his paw, Sun's face glowing on the wrapper.

Carefully, he stashes it in his hatch, setting his eyes on the rest of the complex. He feels much more at ease with the knowledge he has

someone on his side, especially as they near the end of the night, the lights in the complex turning on the closer they get to 6 AM.

Time to get back to the atrium.

By the time Freddy arrives and charges enough for his battery to be less of a hassle, Gregory is out of the elevator, knocking on the glass.

"Gregory!" The door opens and Freddy all but scoops him up, glad to see him unharmed. "I was about to contact you! What happened?"

He seems shaken, swallowing. "The whole place was deserted. I didn't see a single animatronic, not even the DJ."

Not good. Where have they gone?

"The cabinet—it's about her, it's gotta be. She had a sword, and–and she's trying to fight back, but they keep coming, and she—I think something is trying to take control of her." He fumbles, biting his lip. "She had a shadow, like a different version of her. She got trapped in a security office, and then the game shut off."

Freddy nods, stepping out of the station, wires unfurling from his back. "I see. Sun spoke to me—"Gregory makes a face—"and they seem to be the only other one of us who is able to fight the programming. They informed me that Vanny, the white rabbit, is Vanessa, and is in Fazer Blast."

"I think the last cabinet is there, too!"

"Perhaps." Freddy's ear flicks as he opens his hatch, pulling out the wrapper the attendant had given him. "Another thing—Sun gave me one of their Sunnydrops." He shows the candy off in his palm, the boy picking it up.

"It's that... candy?"

"It is a stimulant. It accelerates your heart rate and gives you a dose of energy—I believe Sun gave it to me to better prepare you for what is about to come."

"Okay." Gregory shoves it in his pocket, tucking himself inside the open hatch, the metal closing around him like a firm hug. "She might have a hideout there, in Fazer Blast. Do you think she caused the glitches?"

"She has a hand in it, at least." Freddy marches forward, directly towards where their final attraction is. "However, those arcade cabinets suggest she is not working alone. If that is to be believed, we have more than Vanny—Vanessa—to worry about."

"Let's get to Fazer Blast, then." Gregory schools his nerves, pumping his fist. "We have no time to waste!"

"Yes. Come." Freddy sets his jaw, hiking up his pace. "Let us end this!"

The path to Fazer Blast is the route he is most adjusted to. He is usually poised around the entrance, preparing young cadets as they launch into a world of neon and chaos, all in a fight for control. He supposes it is a fitting place to face off against the white rabbit—shove your way through, capture the flag, and achieve victory, no matter the cost.

The lobby is bright with red and blue light, the S.T.A.F.F. bot holding its tablet. Gregory tugs a party pass from Freddy's hatch, something his boy found in the arcade, and hands it to Freddy. The bot, pleased, allows them entry—Freddy lets Gregory out in the elevator, the music chiming, soothing their frayed nerves.

Then, it's cut short by a voice, garbled and distorted, ragged like the edge of a blade well used.

"Oh, *joy!* You're *finally here."* The voice purrs, Gregory's eyes widening as he looks up at Freddy. The voice is overwhelming, ears flattening against his head, a realization dawning on him—he can hear *her.* He hadn't been able to before. "The two of you have really caused me a lot of trouble. But I'm sure that can all be fixed now!"

"Vanny!" Gregory cries, clenching his hands at his sides. "Give up! You've lost!"

"I haven't lost much of anything." Vanny sighs. "You've lost a lot more than I have. I'm sure dear Freddy wants a word with me, but he's such a spoilsport! I was having so much *fun* before he decided making sure you were taken care of was more important than *playtime."*

"If this is your definition of play, little rabbit," Freddy narrows his eyes, jaw creaking as he brings himself to full height, "then we ought to change that definition in whatever way is best."

"Ooh! I'm so *scared!"* Vanny mocks, tittering with laughter. "The big, *bad* bear is gonna get me! You're so *boring,* Freddy—so resolute in your decisions, but so *sad* when you have to actually commit to them! It's *pathetic!"*

Freddy wills his face to neutrality, no matter how much the words grind his gears, hitting too close for comfort. "You have put us all through quite enough. It is better to stop while you are ahead—you can only do so much, and you seem to have limited your resources."

"And who's fault is that?" Vanny chirps. "You're both the ones who've been beating all your friends senseless! Besides, you're not so scary when the boy's not around. A wipe of your hard drive is all I need to *get what I want."*

"You can't take him away from me!" His boy points at the camera in the corner of the elevator, face gaunt in a frenzy. *"I won't let you!"*

"Oh, how *sweet."* Vanny coos. "A lost little *twerp* wanting so *badly* to keep his *favorite* teddy bear. But kids can't keep their toys forever—and the stage is already set. Don't worry, Gregory—*I'll take care of you both."*

The intercom screams as her voice cuts out, replaced with a red alarm. Freddy lowers his head, extending his claws, opening his hatch for the boy beside him.

Gregory looks up at him, and nods.

Pulling himself in, the hatch shuts just as the doors open, the entrance to the attraction oddly still. The only thing out of place are the blaring red lights and the siren used for emergencies—it clashes against the dirt on his plastic shell, the cracks and damage highlighted. Cutouts of him and his friends dressed as spacemen greeting them at the front of the attraction. They leer over them both, watching, eternal bystanders.

Freddy pushes himself forward into the gleaming, claustrophobic

hallway, growling as he prepares himself for what's around the corner.

All he's met with is the preparation bot, blank eyes staring into his, its helmet and heavy jacket glowing with orange light.

"You must be the new Fazer Blast recruits." It says, oddly calm, as if the attraction isn't screaming around them. It unnerves Freddy, and Gregory puts a hand to his metal plate, forcing him to relax. "From the looks of you, the orange/blue team doesn't stand a chance. Soon you will be fighting for your lives on a hostile alien planet—but first, I am here to tell you how to play the game—"

It stops, head tilted sideways. Its eyes light up with red as it rolls off the platform, Freddy slamming his foot behind him. He throws his fist into its face and it crumples, Freddy's motors hissing as it spasms at his feet.

He steps over it on his way to the next door, pushing past whatever sentiment threatens to destroy him from the inside.

OBJECTIVE: DEFEND GREGORY.

As he strides down the next corridor to the equipment, he amends his current objective, recalling Sun's words—no matter how upset he was with Vanessa, something else was at play here, and he could not blame the entirety of the events of the night on her.

OBJECTIVE: DEFEND GREGORY AND SAVE VANESSA.

Better.

The next door opens. Freddy opens his hatch and Gregory slips out, eyes wide.

"This place is crazy!" He gasps. "I've never played laser tag before."

"Do you know how the game works?"

"You shoot at people with lasers, yeah." Gregory huffs. "Pretty self-explanatory, Freddy."

"Please, be quick." Freddy steps in front of the nearest door, eyes scanning the area proper. With Roxy's x-ray vision, he can spot hordes and hordes of S.T.A.F.F. bots encircling the arena, and a small blip of red in the center, long ears perked as she waves her hands.

Freddy snarls. Not good. *Not good at all.* There are so many of them, and although he can't see the rest of his band mates, he flicks through the cameras, spotting them in the daycare. Sun has dragged them there and is trying to keep them seated, but they are becoming more and more restless, like they're being forcefully tugged in the direction of Vanny.

Center of gravity.

Above them, there is an outline of an abandoned security office. It has been out of commission for years, but the door is open, which it shouldn't be.

"How bad is it? Your face is telling me it's really bad."

"Not optimal. Vanny has gathered as many S.T.A.F.F. as she can, it seems." Freddy turns his head and sees Gregory holding a Fazer Blaster gingerly, face pale in the neon lights, worsened by the screen over his face as the helmet he's wearing comes to life. "I will defend you. I see something above the arena as well—you said she could have a hideout, yes?"

"Yeah! When we were going through the construction area near Roxy's Raceway, I thought I saw a catwalk leading to somewhere." Gregory nods up to Freddy as they step inside the last hallway, orange light creeping up their bodies. "That must be where she operates from. It's hidden, and difficult to get to."

"A perfect spot for our dangerous rabbit."

"How do I get to it?"

Freddy takes a closer look. The outline of the doorway leads down a steep staircase, to a vent in the furthest wall. He can't make out much else, but based on the direction, it comes from the Superstar Lounge.

Freddy's motors hiss in a sigh.

"We are going to have to play the game." Freddy turns to Gregory, pointing upwards. "The only way to access through normal means is through the winner's elevator, as the staircase on the other end is connected to a locked service tunnel. The lounge should open once we do so. There is a vent that I believe leads up to it."

"But there's no way Vanny will let us leave through the green team's elevator." Gregory gulps, realizing the same thing Freddy already has.

"W–we're gonna have to win, aren't we?"

The door slams shut as the lights turn from orange to red, the elevator leading up to the arena shuddering as it moves up. Freddy bows his head, solemn. It wouldn't be such an impossible task if Vanny hadn't summoned all the backup she could get—his circuits itch with the knowledge he'd have to destroy more of his brethren to even get a fighting chance.

Gregory, despite his own fear, puts a comforting hand on Freddy's knee. "I'll go up there, okay? You keep Vanny in the arena while I go investigate. I'll keep you updated."

"I worry that the other animatronics will not be held back for much longer by Sun." Freddy grits his teeth. "However, I will worry about that. Let us rock this stage!"

"Let's rock!"

The doors open.

Gregory bolts out of the elevator, Freddy's feet slamming on the carpet. Bots surround them, some dirty, some with helmets, some with flashlights, all with their eyes red as they rush the pair. Freddy howls in warning, the bots shaking their heads as Chica's voice box does its job, Freddy throwing his fist into the one closest to Gregory.

"Go!"

His boy runs off in the opposite direction as Freddy shreds through bot after bot, servos whirring at the strain on his system. They are not as

advanced as he is, and although they lurch at him, clawing wherever they can reach, he slices through them easily enough.

There are just so *many of them,* and only *one of him.*

His vision is overloaded with alerts, both from Gregory zagging through an arena he isn't familiar with, along with Vanny encroaching quickly towards them.

Seized by a righteous, desperate fury, Freddy unsheathes his claws properly, the full brunt of his rage incapacitating the bots struggling to bring him down as he snaps and bites. He all but goes through them, shoulder hitting a wall, growling as he traces Gregory's path.

His boy is rushing towards the first visible checkpoint, and the one closest to the elevator. It glitters green with the button on top, Gregory lurching as he slams his palm on it.

"You have captured the flag!" The voice rings out from Gregory's helmet. *"Time to defend!"*

Bots all race to their location, alerted by their systems. Vanny crackles over the intercom, tutting as Freddy snarls, widening his stance. "Whatever you're trying to do isn't gonna work! I can't just let you win, you know."

"I welcome the challenge." Freddy crushes his fist into his palm, crimson replacing ivory light. "Nothing is better than some *friendly* competition, yes?"

Freddy uppercuts the closest bot and its head flies off. Gregory hits the

next one in the eyes with the blaster, the bot reeling and running back. Freddy hits it in the back for good measure, making it fall to the ground. Several bots try to roll over it, but get stuck in place—Freddy swings his arm in a wide arc and they crash like dominos, the line faltering just as the timer runs out.

"You have successfully defended Station 1!" Gregory's helmet says. "Move to the next, Space Cadet!"

"Let's go, Freddy!"

Two bots manage to swerve out of the way, driving right at Freddy. The bear tilts his head and grabs them both by their helmets, slamming them together, dropping them as they shudder with electricity.

"Understood!"

The two march in unison, Gregory rushing ahead, slipping between two bots. He turns a corner and Freddy has to shove a bot out of the way, hitting the carpet with a dull thunk. He has no opportunity to feel bad about what he's doing—all he can focus on is the twinkling lights, Gregory's helmet bobbing and weaving out of the way of bots, and his own body, fueled by electricity, paws cracking plastic and metal and insulation.

When they round the last bend before the flag, the entire platform is circled by bots, all eagerly turning in their direction and storming towards them. Freddy steps in front of Gregory, grabbing a piece of the wall. With a roar, he throws it in an arc over his head, the bots unable to swerve out of the way in time as it crashes into them.

"Stop! Stop it!" Vanny calls down from above from the intercom.

"You're playing dirty! You're *cheating!"*

"Cheating feels great!" Gregory laughs, hitting the remaining bots in the face. He doesn't notice the one lurching up behind him, not until Freddy's deep snarl makes him turn his head. He screams as it slaps at his helmet visor, lurching his hand up, squeezing the trigger of his Fazer Blaster.

Freddy, who is leering over the bot, jaw open, ready to tear its arm off with his teeth, yelps as the laser hits him in his eyes, stumbling back.

"Freddy!"

"Gregory, *bad shot!"* Freddy gurgles, blindly lashing out at the bot. His fist hits metal, the bot freezing in place as it deactivates. Freddy flaps his ears as he shakes his head, groaning.

"I–I'm sorry! I didn't mean to!"

"My, my! Bad shot indeed!" Vanny chortles over the intercom, Freddy's ears perking as the tires of more bots squeal over the carpet, all closing in from around the arena. "At least you're making this entertaining, but I'm afraid this is the end of the line. *Get them!"*

"The flag!" Freddy wipes at his snout, blinking as his vision slips in and out of focus. "Get the flag, Gregory!"

Gregory does so, his helmet ringing. "You have captured the flag! *Time to defend!"*

"To your left, Freddy!"

Freddy swings in that direction, knuckles hitting plastic. *Got it.* He uses his hearing to pinpoint the next foe, Gregory directing him. "Right! Hard right!"

The bear kicks at a tire, then all but barrels into the bot. It crumples under his weight as he tackles it to the floor.

"In front of you!"

Freddy throws his fist at the center as he rises, helmet clattering off the robot's head. As he does so, his vision clears back into perfect clarity, able to spot Gregory shooting from a piece of wall, tucked in a safe corner.

"Good job, superstar!"

Gregory turns to him, smile relieved, before his jaw falls open in surprise.

"Behind you!"

Freddy slams his elbow into the offending force, turning his head for a proper look—

—and finds it's *Chica.*

She stumbles back, shaking her head from the impact. Freddy's motors hiss as he jumps, Gregory's helmet ringing with the alarm. "You have successfully defended Station 2! Move to the next, Space Cadet!"

"Chica!" Freddy says, arms wide as he holds them in front of his boy, unwilling to allow the chicken any closer. "What are you doing?!"

Sun, he thinks faintly. *I haven't checked—no, no, no, this can't be happening.*

"What am *I* doing?!" Chica squawks, automated voice buzzing with distortion. Either she had found a replacement voice box that wasn't up to the challenge, or she was using the backup pre-installed on their hard drives in case of emergencies. Either way, it was warped, and Freddy could hardly make out her words. "What are *you* doing?! The boy should be gone by now, and last I checked, you were fighting to get him out of here, weren't you?!"

"Something came up." Freddy steps in Gregory's direction, eyes narrowing. "Stay out of this, Chica. Please. I promise that everything will make sense soon."

"What are you talking about?!" Chica clucks as Freddy scoops Gregory up and races down the hall. *"Freddy!"*

She stumbles after them, but isn't able to match Freddy's frantic pace as he runs, twisting around a corner. His system beeps dangerously and he's forced to stop, shaking as he carefully puts Gregory down. "I– I am running low on battery."

His boy glances up at him, then flits to Chica's direction, biting his lip. "I'll get to the top first, okay? There's only one station left. I'll be alright."

"I know. I am coming with you. I just need a moment to recover." It's like he's winded from the emotional whiplash—from seeing Chica, to hearing Vanny cackling over the intercom, to seeing Gregory in harm's way—and he's more than a little overwhelmed. "Go. I will be with you in a moment."

Gregory nods and runs off, Freddy shaking as he covers his face, motors hissing.

Regardless of how low his battery level is now, he has to keep moving. They are not yet finished with Vanny, much less Vanessa. That's not even mentioning the glitches, or whatever's behind the curtain.

His eyes notice an abyss to his left. It has to be the service tunnel the bots are flooding from.

The other entrance? The one with the staircase?

If Vanny shuts down the elevator…

He braces himself, face screwing up. He can do this. Even if the others come, he will stop at nothing to achieve what he needs to.

Freddy checks his alerts.

He freezes.

Vanny's red blip is dangerously close to Gregory's blue one.

Snarling, Freddy rushes from behind the wall, head snapping around. Each corner is a twisted maze, bots littering the ground. Some are still able to move, clawing his feet and legs. Some break under his weight. Some stare up at him, lifeless, as if personally affronted that their tormentor has returned to defile them.

He shakes his head, focusing on his mini-map.

Up the ramp, Vanny closes in. He hears Gregory scream in fear.

Freddy jumps over the last few feet between him and the center of the arena.

Their two blips intertwine just as he turns the last corner, and sees Vanny crouched on the bridge, Gregory struggling against her grip on his arm.

"Let me go!"

The rabbit has something in her other hand. It gleams, neon lighting it up—*a butcher knife, long and elegant, sharpened and prime for use.*

Freddy screeches, his eyes flickering red. Vanny gasps and loosens her grip in surprise, the boy jumping away from her, scrambling up the incline as he races to the center flag.

The rabbit levels her hatred-ridden expression to him, mouth agape,

as if she is constantly prepared to inhale her victims *whole.* Her buck teeth shine like her blade, putting a hand to her chin as she twirls it.

"Oh, Freddy!" Vanny giggles, red light bathing her in sin. "I thought you were preoccupied! Why, you're so mad at me, we've become a matching pair!"

His objective glows at the top of his vision, Vanessa's name flashing vibrantly.

He loosens his limbs, the lights of his eyes flickering back to ivory. The rabbit huffs, shaking her head. "Oh, what a shame! I was hoping we would have so much *fun* together!"

"Vanessa, *please,* come back to us." Freddy urges, trying not to allow his instincts to get the better of him. "Please. There is not much else you can do now, and we cannot allow you to struggle like this, when you are not deserving of this pain—let us help you."

"H-how do you—*argh! I don't need your help!"* Vanny reels at Freddy's tone and his words, both taken aback and enraged by his attempt. "I don't want it, either, but I *especially* don't need it! What I need for you is to stay *out of my way!"*

With a wave of her hand, more bots rush behind Freddy, shoving him down into the arena below.

He hits the ground with a terrible crash, his casing rattling and cracking further. He shakes his head as his system recalibrates, body jolting as electricity pulses through his joints and circuits, rasping out in shock and *pain.*

"Freddy, *no!"*

Bots swarm all around him. Freddy barely manages to stand, head jerking, holding his stomach hatch as the worst of it tears through him. He hears Gregory's helmet go off, knows that the swarm is close, and hopes he can defend his position on his own.

He can't do much of anything else *from down here.*

"I've had *enough* of you, *Freddy."* Vanny growls, looming over him. "You were the only one I couldn't manage to keep in place, or *control,* all because of that *stupid glitch.* But the spotlight is a fickle thing—and your *time is up."*

She tugs a button from her pocket, the green outline of Freddy's head clashing with the crimson of her eyes, pupils two dark pits, like twin glimpses into her madness. "Let me put in *perspective* the position you're both in—you're in *my world now,* and you've had quite a few cheap thrills, disturbing all of my plans—and I'm afraid I *can't let this go on any longer."*

She waves her hand, the bots raising their heads, all together, like she is their pinnacle.

"Disassemble Freddy."

She presses the button, throws her head back, and cackles.

No. Not happening.

NEW OBJECTIVE: FIGHT FOR YOUR LIFE!

Protocol loading…

Freddy stands, proud, staring death right in the face.

He can't falter here. He refuses.

ENABLED. SYSTEMS WILL BEGIN OVERDRIVE IN 3, 2, 1...

Freddy twitches as his body overflows with his remaining battery charge, flaring to life, like a second wind.

Go, go, go!

Gregory sucks in a breath as he watches Freddy ravage through the fresh wave of S.T.A.F.F., despite his damage, despite everything that should be preventing him from being able to. His head snaps as Vanny turns to him. He can't tell if she's surprised by Freddy's resistance, but he finds he can't care, not when she starts swinging her arms as she skips towards him. *Like a child.*

Gregory pulls up his gun and shoots.

Vanny screeches when it hits her, batting at her eyes as she hunches over. "You *brat!"*

Gregory sticks out his tongue as his helmet goes off for the final time.

"You have defeated the alien army! Good job, Space Cadet! Proceed to the winner's elevator for your reward."

His helmet flashes him a map of his current location, along with where the winner's elevator is. He can hear Freddy ripping the bots below him to pieces, and Vanny is still shaking her head, stumbling forward at the realization that things are not going the way she wants them to.

"No!" She gasps. "No, no! *I won't let you!"*

Gregory turns on his heel and runs.

She chases after him, still disoriented from the light. *"Get back here!"*

Gregory sprints down the ramp, down into the pit. Bots are *everywhere,* convulsing, the wall behind him splintering as one is thrown into a growing pile. Freddy glows with bright blue light, screeching, swinging his arms as he turns his waist, wrecking through anything in his path.

Gregory doesn't have time to gape in amazement at his guardian. He slips past the worst of it, spotting the elevator glowing, the blaster return box sitting next to it.

He swallows. He doesn't want to let go of his newfound blaster. He has the camera, yes, but the blaster is less finicky, and he can control it better than the alternative.

When he presses the button to the elevator, it doesn't budge.

Vanny. She's locked his only exit—or so he thinks.

"Gregory." The boy starts when Freddy speaks from his watch, sighing in relief to hear from him. "I still… have a signal. There is another way to the office—there is a maintenance tunnel open, likely to help the bots enter the arena. Go, *quickly*—Vanny is running out of bots to summon, but I am more worried about the other animatronics."

Gregory gulps and rushes to the new area on his map, trusting Freddy's judgement. He rushes past the elevator and down the hall, back into the furthest corner. A door gapes open, like Vanny's mouth. Pumping his legs, Gregory sinks into the corner of the room behind it, trembling as the door closes—

—white and green hands come up to grip the bottom before it can shut. It lurches up, and Gregory shrieks, Chica barely able to prevent the door from snapping shut. *Her dead eyes stare into his—*

—and Freddy slams into her, the door shutting, rattling from the impact as Freddy roars.

Gregory sucks in tight breaths as he shivers, taking off the helmet. He doesn't need it anymore, and now that the screen is off, it's dark, and he can't see as well. It falls to the ground as he rubs his face, taking stock of himself.

He still has his duffel on him. Between all the weaving and running, he was worried he would lose it, but it has clung to his side the whole time. His Faz Watch is cracked, but they may have been from before. His hands are clammy, his collar cold from dried sweat, and he can't stop thinking about Vanny.

Is she like that? Is that her true sense of self? Or is she trapped, like him, in this *maze?*

He has to keep moving. Can't afford to think, not now. He wills the blood in his ears to stop roaring and pushes forward, ragged and just wanting to rest for a moment, just a moment.

Not a moment to spare.

He shoves past a shelving unit, past the purple walls of the tunnel proper, heedless of the bots rushing at his back. He clutches his blaster in his hand, finger trained over the trigger.

When he shoves open the staff only door, his heart jumps in his throat.

Roxy twists as she faces him, snout twisted in a snarl. "There you are!"

Monty, further in the back, cackles when he sees him. "There's Freddy's *wayward cub! Let's get 'im!"*

Gregory shrieks as they both rush towards him, hands outstretched—

—he hears a jingle from above, thumping from behind him, Chica screeching as she joins her fellow bandmates in finally cornering the kid who's caused them so much trouble—

—and then a warmth spreads over Gregory's shoulders, a friendly face skimming the grated floor, landing with their hands in the air and a smile on their face.

"Sun!"

"My friends!" Cries Sun, twirling in place. "Why, you left me mid-performance the last time I saw you! I had to follow you all so I could perform the final act!"

"We don't wanna watch your puppet show, Sunny!" Monty snarls, rolling behind the attendant. They have to grab him by the edge of his neck casing to keep him in place, the gator wiggling in their grip. "Let me go!"

"I'm sorry, but I can't let any of you pass by this point!" Sun tugs Monty up and holds him, the gator infuriated by the attendant's concerning amount of strength. "Only when we finish Hamlet will I allow you to pass."

"That'll take too long!" Roxy growls, diving towards where the source of the noise is. Sun tugs on their wire and it comes falling from the ceiling, wrapping it tightly around Monty's snout and torso. Once Monty is out of their hands and on the ground, roaring in disbelief as he lashes out, the attendant dances out of the way of Roxy's charge. When she rises, Sun wraps more wire around her throat and legs, tugging the wire to bring her down, too.

Chica squawks at the sight of her two friends tangled in a heap, narrowing her eyes. She lurches to Sun's side and rushes, clawing at the insulation, her fingers not able to cause too much damage. She realizes her mistake too late when Sun wraps the last part of the wire around her hands, dragging her in the pile.

Sun, successful, knots the end of it in the grating of the floor. Sun turns their head and gives Gregory a thumbs-up.

"Go! Quickly!" They call. "I'm afraid this will not hold them for long!"

Gregory bolts up the staircase at that, not wanting to risk sticking around. He thanks every lucky star he can think of that Sun managed to override Vanny's programming and had traced the animatronics' location just in time.

The staircase is long, neon dizzying and making his head throb. The bright colors are too much, have been the whole time, but the catwalk give his eyes a much needed break.

It seems to stretch on forever. The door to the office is open, inviting and commanding, Vanny's name bright in the dark. He looks down and sees Freddy in the center of the carnage he's inflicted. There are countless bots, so many Gregory can't count, as he stands, triumphant.

Freddy spots Gregory, and grins, giving him a thumbs-up. His watch chimes as his mouth moves: "Good job, superstar! I will join you as soon as I can!"

No sign of Vanny. He has to hurry.

Gregory races to the end of the catwalk, slipping in Vanny's room. It's messy, and it's obvious the room isn't intended to be used, especially now—there's cobwebs caught in the drop ceiling, monitors glowing with blue light. Pizza boxes and trash litter the area, a cot stashed in the corner.

She's been sleeping here? Gregory turns his head to the brightest source of light in the room—*Princess Quest 3.*

He was right—she is connected to these machines.

Time to end this, once and for all.

Gregory rifles through his duffel, then frowns, noticing the quarter already on the screen.

Like a gift. *An invitation.*

He grabs it and slides it in the slot.

A trap?

The game's music starts in earnest. He's back in the weird security office. The same unease overtakes him as he steps out into a dark hallway.

The game passes by in a blur. There are faces in the bottom of the floor, shadows stretching over the screen. The princess is the sole guiding light, endlessly chasing something she doesn't want to find, but is desperate to uncover regardless. He can't understand the green rabbit, but he understands the mask—Vanny's pixel gaze stares into his soul just as much as her actual one does.

It ends with the monster in the deepest pit crawling, crawling, up from his tomb. The princess stares in absolute wonder, frozen.

Then there's the click of a door, a paw wrapping around the side of the cabinet, and Gregory is pulled back into reality.

Vanny is silent as she stares at him, knife in her other hand. She says nothing, the princess glowing, the monster trembling as it groans.

"You know too much." She whispers, voice distorted, crawling from her throat. "If you could leave this place, I would let you. But I have disappointed him too many times—he wants your blood on my hands, Gregory."

Her paw finds his chin, pulling it up. He is forced to gaze into the fiery flames, the green underneath clashing under her pupils.

"Don't be afraid—I will make you *art."*

"I am afraid that will not be the end result of this, Vanny."

The rabbit jolts, peering at the opposite doorway. Freddy stands, in the whole of his totality. He is scratched, and damaged, coated in oil and dirt and everything questionable. But he still stands, regardless of every attempt Vanny has tried.

He is the one she cannot beat. She knows this. He knows this. Gregory can only guess.

"There are two of you, yes?" He says, voice eerily calm. Gregory's throat clicks as he swallows, Vanny's claws digging into his cheek. "Two of you, trapped in a dance. Are you not both tired?"

"Shut *up."* Vanny growls, hand trembling. Gregory realizes she's *scared.* "Shut *up!* You know nothing about me, you walking piece of *scrap!"*

"We all know that is untrue." Freddy smiles, encouraging. Vanny shivers as her eyes flit from him to Gregory, like she is uncertain of either's intent.

Despite it all, Sun's words still ring in his system as he opens his arms.

Vanny—*Vanessa,* he thinks, *Vanessa, the princess, the one trapped under this spell*—freezes.

Freddy can only hope for the best as she considers him—truly considers him, arms outstretched, face surprisingly gentle. She's shaking, and the knife in her hand is loose in her grip.

"Why?" She stares at him, red eyes unblinking, something soft in the depths of her garbled voice. "Why are you doing this? Why are you extending *kindness* to me?"

"Because," Freddy tilts his head, and smiles, "you are a victim, too, Vanessa. Come back to us."

Vanny shakes her head, and then reconsiders. The knife clatters from her hand as she stares, fingers twitching,

"I will take care of you." Freddy's tone is impossibly soft. "Please. You deserve a better lot in life, and I wish to provide that for you."

"I—" The rabbit hiccups. "D-do you mean that?"

"Of course." Freddy ushers her forward, Gregory's eyes widening as Vanessa tentatively does so. "I will not let any harm befall you again, comet tail."

And with that, all of Vanessa's restraint breaks.

The girl lurches forward into his arms, trembling fiercely, a sob tearing from her throat as Freddy hugs her. He places a comforting hand on her back, Gregory carefully putting a hand on her shoulder.

She cries for some time. Freddy simply comforts her throughout it, quiet but gentle, patient, and when she is finished and the sobs die off, she tugs the head of her costume off.

"I'm sorry," she blurts, her blonde hair a mess, green eyes bloodshot from tears. "I'm so, *so sorry,* for *everything."*

"Do not fear." Freddy smiles. "We are here to light the path for the princess, are we not?"

Vanessa's smile wobbles on her face, sniffing as she looks down at Gregory. She finds his hand and squeezes it, tightly, bowing her head.

"You don't have to say anything." Gregory murmurs. "As long as you're

okay, that's all that matters."

The blonde nods, face wet with tears. Freddy wipes at it with his thumb, Vanessa gathering herself.

"Thank you." She swallows, allowing herself to be content in Freddy's embrace, in Gregory's absolution. "Thank you."

They sit in silence, Vanessa's sniffling abiding. She turns in on herself, pulling away from Freddy's embrace, stumbling to the monitor.

She says nothing as she pulls a flash drive from her pocket, shoving it in the USB. The colors dance, purple and yellow trembling, until the bar in the center reaches its full percentage.

The lights dim, then raise, a power surge shaking the complex. Freddy winces and holds his head, a familiar alert shining in his vision.

It's purple.

YOU ARE FREE.

Freddy blinks, Gregory putting a hand on his shoulder, concerned. Vanessa presses her lips in a thin line, eyes tracing the CRT of the machine.

The monster on the screen trembles, screeching. The princess raises her blade, striking it in the forehead, the creature roaring as she beats it back into the dark.

The screen goes black.

"It's done." Vanessa whispers. "The glitching—all of it. Except for *him."*

Freddy and Gregory's expressions are imploring. Vanessa lowers her head, tangling her fingers together.

"I can't explain how I met him. It was—there was something wrong with a game I was playing, made by the company. I was a new recruit at the time, and they were asking everyone to play this… VR game, and he—" She sighs. "—he found me. He found me, wanting things I couldn't have, and took *advantage* of me. I didn't realize it until it was too late, and he… infected me. I couldn't rationalize it, I went to therapy, I did everything I could to try and figure it all out—but nothing worked. He made *her,* and I'm not completely innocent, but—" She shakes her head, raking fingers through her hair. "I couldn't do what he wanted me to do! I couldn't hurt—I couldn't hurt any of them, not a one, not when they *trusted me*—"

"Vanessa." Freddy murmurs, hand outstretched. She takes it, eyes shining with fresh tears, despite her exhaustion, despite her head swimming. "Who is he?"

"Afton." She twists her fingers against Freddy's claws, like she's trying to find something to ground herself. "His name is William Afton, and he's in the basement."

Freddy's face tightens with something vague, like a memory has been brought to the surface, only to be snuffed out by a breeze.

"What is he?"

"He was a person, once." She snorts. "He's in this—rancid machine that's too old to function properly. I have no idea, but I found him in a scrapyard, and I've kept him in the place since."

"He's the one who made all of this happen?" Gregory whispers, knuckles whitening as he curls his hand into a fist.

"Most of it." Vanessa blows a piece of hair from her nose. "I can lead you to him, but I don't—I can't go down there myself. Now that Vanny isn't—" She chokes on her words, putting a hand to her mouth. "—isn't around, right now, I don't—I don't want to risk him getting in my head again."

"We'll handle it." Gregory claims, Freddy nodding. "If he's the source behind all of this, we need to take care of him. If we don't, nothing will change."

"I'll help." Vanessa's smile is grim. "I know him the most out of you all. I know how to slip past his defenses. If we surprise him, we might be able to take him down."

"I shall attend to you both." Freddy's hands find the two's own. "I am always at your service. Whatever you need, I will accomplish."

"We better get going." Vanessa turns to the monitor and grimaces at the clock. "Day shift is due to come in at 8, and it's almost 7. We're running out of time."

The three walk from the room onto the catwalk. Underneath is the course, still muddled with bots, but there are a trio of familiar figures huddled together, the jester twirling circles around them.

He sees them all in full—his friends, mangled and broken, looking to him for leadership, for guidance, just as before—and his jaw clacks shut.

He can make it right.

There's something pulling inside of him. Something indefinite, like a hand is holding his generator, tugging him forward.

Something old, primal, a danger lurking in the back of his motherboard. Something that he remembers from before, and even from before that. Something he can't pin down.

And it's primed to strike.

Chapter End Notes

so this fic ended up being way longer than i anticipated and i had to split it into two parts. second part is currently being edited and should be out soon, likely early next week.

honestly in awe by how many people have commented + supported me writing this thing. don't know what to say except THANK YOU!!! special thanks to @seaherb02 on twitter/tumblr/instagram for their absolutely gorgeous art for behemoth. literally was the first fic i've ever written in full and it got art for it from someone as skilled as that?? help??

anyway. thanks again for reading. tune in for whenever i decide to beat up the man behind the slaughter haha

belly of the beast

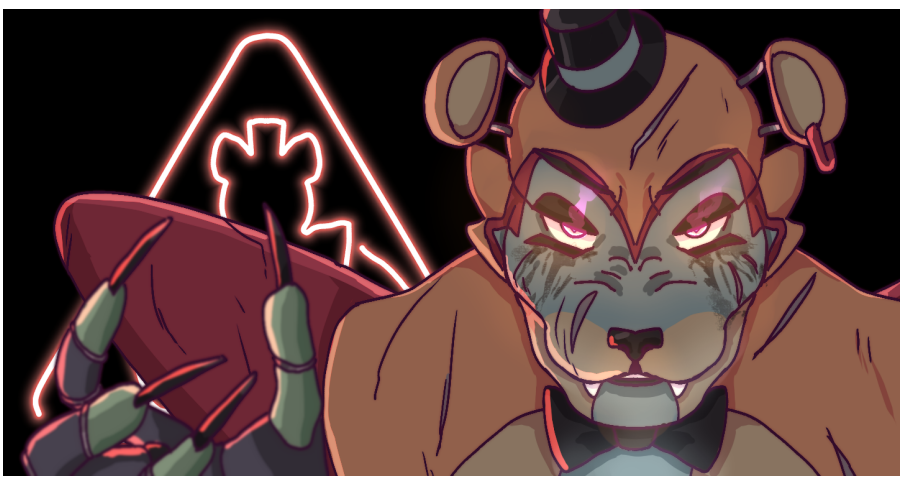
Chapter Summary

Down below, in the depths, Freddy finds himself. Afton finds him, too.

Chapter Notes

we are approaching the end folks. fazbear entertainment asks that you keep your hands and feet inside the vehicle at all times—the track is a little bumpy, but we'll get there, i promise!

See the end of the chapter for more notes



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Their first destination is the Superstar Lounge.

Vanessa insists upon it. "It gives me the best vantage point of the rest of the complex—and it's one of the few places that has the entire camera set, other than the central office, but it's much closer."

Neither Freddy nor Gregory deny her. She's shaken up, badly, still emotionally drained from their confrontation. Sun, having sensed her distress with their wide sensor range, has come crawling up to the

catwalk, putting a hand on her shoulder. She huffs when Sun pokes her nose. “Yeah, I know, I get it. I’m fine. Let’s get to the winner’s elevator and re-group properly.”

It is a rather strange experience, stepping over broken pieces of S.T.A.F.F. bots, all destroyed by a single animatronic. Freddy’s mouth twitches, remorseful, but Vanessa and Gregory are just awed by the amount. The boy puts his Fazer Blaster in the return box, the elevator whirring to action.

“I don’t know what *she* was thinking,” Vanessa whispers. “She didn’t stand a chance against you. Not with you being capable of *this.”*

“I did not know I was capable of it until I attempted it.” Freddy’s brows furrowed. “I do not believe I would have been able to do so had I not had prior combat experience.”

“And your protocol?”

“And my protocol, yes.” Freddy’s fingers comb through Gregory’s curls as they wait for the elevator to open, his boy easing into the touch, a little more weary than he previously had been. In all honesty, it was a surprise he was still standing. “What of the others?”

“Oh, don’t worry! They’ll be here in a jiffy!” Sun giggles, tapping their hands together. “They might take awhile, though. With all of these bots, they’ll have to reroute, and they aren’t used to having access to the course!”

Freddy’s ears droop, shame flickering through his body. To face them

now, when he has done all that he has, and his enabling of Gregory…

His boy must read his expression, as his hand twines into Freddy's own, giving it a heartfelt squeeze. Freddy squeezes back, at a loss of what else to do.

The elevator dings as the doors open. Vanessa and Sun step inside, and Gregory moves to join them, but Freddy stays frozen, eyes wide and haunted.

Gregory looks up at him, confused. He looks behind Freddy's shoulder and hears, more than sees, the other animatronics marching. Chica's footsteps have always been the lightest, and she screeches more than speaks as they get closer. Monty's body is scraping against the carpet, a rough chuckle escaping him. Roxy bumps into walls, her voice a rasp, all three of them coming into view behind Freddy's broken and cracked shoulder pads.

They stop the moment they spot the pair.

"Please." Is all Freddy can say, shutting his eyes tight. "I–I *need* you here."

Gregory tightens his grip and hugs Freddy's arm, Vanessa and Sun stunned as the elevator doors shut.

Freddy gathers himself as best as he can. His motors hiss in distress as he turns his head, then the rest of him, only able to because of Gregory's warm touch.

He faces his friends. Restored only to their senses, they are still torn to shreds, cracked and mangled. He wonders if they are beyond repair. If they are all fated to be torn apart and given new life as parts to new animatronics, their replacements.

Something stings at his eyes.

“Freddy.” Chica is the first to speak, as well as she can. The voice box in his throat weighs, heavy as it's always been, around his neck. “Gregory. Yes. It has… been an awful night for us all, hasn’t it?”

Gregory hides behind Freddy’s body, trembling. Chica’s face falls, and Monty drags himself to the center, waving his arm in the air. Freddy’s claws feel as though they’re dragging to the floor.

Freddy blinks, and black oil trails down his cheeks, like tears.

“Woah, woah! We got off on the wrong foot, kiddo, and–and I—” Monty growls as the words refuse to come to him. “We all got–a lot to apologize for, okay?”

“We do.” Roxy cuts in, the red chasms of her face making Freddy’s eyes worsen, shutting them as the oil drains down. Chica softly gasps, realizing what’s happening, and Monty’s jaw falls open in surprise, but Roxy *can’t see a thing*. “We have to—to do *something,* you know? Pup, I promise we’re not all bad. I know that sounds dumb, I know, but—”

“Freddy.” Gregory tugs Freddy’s hand, forcing the bear to look at him. Gregory’s face is pale. “Y–you’re crying.”

Silence. Freddy is met with stunned silence, his boy leaning up to wipe away the oil. Freddy's body shakes with an overwhelmed sob, sinking into his boy's embrace, collapsing to the ground.

The others edge closer to the bear, Chica being the first to attempt contact. Her touch is gentle, understanding, as she rubs her palm over Freddy's back. Monty finds Freddy's free hand, squeezing it. Roxy, ears flicking, nudges her hands across his side until she learns in, hugging him.

Freddy's weeping worsens as he sinks into the brunt of his despair, unable to stand what he's done. He has been a cruel creature, a thing to be hated, not *loved.*

Yes, his systems ring out, wavering into something darker, and that same creeping feeling makes its home in the back of his head. *Yes, you are. That is your design, isn't it?*

"I have… too much to say, in too little time." Freddy chokes out. "I am afraid we m-must keep going… I am terribly sorry."

"Don't feel bad for crying, big guy." Monty hums. "You've been a good papa bear to the kid, and we've been real mean this whole time."

"B-but it is not your fault!" Freddy wrenches his head up, ears folding back. "I–I have—I should have—"

“I was the one who destroyed them, Freddy.” Gregory’s voice is small, but he still looks up at him, despite his own tears clouding his vision. “I–I’m the one who’s done the worst stuff, if there’s anybody to blame. Okay?”

“You are a child!” All four of them cry in unison, Gregory’s face scrunching in revolt.

“That doesn’t mean—”

“—yes, you are responsible for your actions, we know,” Freddy grabs Gregory’s shoulders, shaking him gently. “But you are still only 11, Gregory, and considering the circumstances…”

He stops, motors hissing in a sigh. He sounds as though he’s also excusing himself, isn’t he?

“Exactly.” Roxy taps Freddy’s ear with her clawed finger. “Freddy, that applies to you, too. You were just doing your best in the worst situation you could’ve ended up in.”

“We can address this all later.” Monty raps his knuckles against his forearm. “Right now, we gotta deal with the dude in the basement, right? Vanessa told us about everything already, with the update when we got freed, and you're gonna need all the help you can get if you plan on dealing with him.”

“We are here for you, Freddy.” Chica puts on her best smile, as well as she can. “We’ll do whatever you need us to. Just give us the word.”

Freddy's voice box crackles like a weak gasp, nodding. He clutches Gregory close as the boy does his best to rub away the worst of the oil, fingers blackened and teal paint smeared.

The elevator door opens yet again. They step inside, cramming into the space, Freddy choking back his weakness. He has never lost his composure, not this entire time, never like this, but it's like he's been punctured, and something is *bleeding* inside of him.

He cannot fathom the relief he feels. It should be impossible for him to cry, and yet he has, despite all odds.

Gregory is gentle as he rubs away at the worst of it. His friends remain quiet, wanting Freddy some degree of privacy as he resets his protocols, doing anything he can to regain some semblance of normality.

With a click, he feels like he can move again, and sets Gregory down just as the door opens for them.

The neon hallway warps them all into nothing but light and shadows. Gregory pulls Freddy along, keeping him going. He's grateful for it—without him, he would be trapped with his own systems and errors, too overcome with his actions and their consequences.

They have to keep moving. They have to.

Vanessa is waiting for them, her rabbit suit replaced with her usual security uniform, as they enter the lounge proper. In her hand is the golden Fazer Blaster, gleaming in the light. Gregory grins, believing he

had to give up his previous weapon to push forward—and she hands it to him, hesitant. Slowly, oh, so slowly, she brushes a hand through his hair, ruffling it, and he barks out a soft laugh.

The black oil rubs into the gold from his grip. Freddy feels sick.

"Sun's in the other room. They'll tell you guys where to go next." Her face hardens as she looks up at Freddy, something indescribable flitting on her features, before it's gone, like it was never there.

She stays behind as the others move towards the door, confusion evident, but still following her orders. Gregory lingers at the doorway, watching as Freddy raises a questioning brow. She shakes her head, indiscernible, and he keeps his feet planted where they are as Gregory hesitantly steps into the next room, shutting the door behind him.

"We gotta talk." Is the first thing out of Vanessa's mouth.

"And why could we not discuss this with the others around?"

"We're—*she's*—not done with you, and neither am I." Vanessa rubs her arm, sighing. "Besides, I didn't—I don't want to scare Gregory. But it's important, and I'm telling you this because you need to know."

Freddy's ears twitch, crossing his arms. Vanessa rubs her hand against her face, gathering her courage.

"Freddy, you already know what's in the basement."

Silence. Freddy's brow raises further, eyes widening slightly. Vanessa fidgets, then curses under her breath.

"I—*she*—took you there. I'd let her explain, but she's—she's not too happy with me right now, and I don't want to make her more upset."

"I–I do not recall it."

"It's because she scrubbed your memory." Vanessa tenses, squeezing her arm, like she's uncertain of what to do with her limbs. "She—she brought you down there to scare you. Because you wouldn't listen. Because you failed all—all of her tests, and she—"

"—she brought me down there to frighten me?"

"To teach you a lesson." Vanessa licks her lips. "It was against—*his*—wishes, and so she reset you. She couldn't manage to scrub everything, though. Do you remember how you got back from Bonnie Bowl to your room?"

"Wait." Freddy's motors hiss. "Are you talking about the night that Bonnie—"

"—yes, it was that night. Chloe knew what was in the basement, too. *He* told *her* to stop the girl, but *you* kept getting in the way, and then I —*she*—" Vanessa groans, rubbing her temples. "—*she* showed you. I don't know how you'll react to it the second time, but the first time, you didn't respond. *At all.* It was like you couldn't, like there were too many different ways to, and you got soft-locked."

"Vanessa, I do not remember… any of this." Freddy stretches a hand

out, and Vanessa takes it in her own, the blonde shaking. "What… what could possibly be down there that you cannot describe to me?"

Vanessa bites her lip, hard.

"They… they were trying to save me." She whispers. "All of them. The whole time, while he was—*he was*—and, and they… they tried, but they couldn't. And you already know what happened to them."

Freddy bows his head, gears grinding as he tries to recall anything, any figment of what Vanessa is discussing, what her cryptic words *mean,* but finds nothing.

"Vanessa…"

"I don't want to explain. To *remember."* She breathes. "I don't—I don't think you'll know until you see them. But, Freddy—it's gotten worse. Maybe I shouldn't remember, but you *need to.* It's—I—" Vanessa shakes her head, gritting her teeth, fighting to get the words out. "Monty… was the easiest to get into."

"What?"

"He was brand new, back then." Her tone turns into something shrill, something alien. "He didn't have a single proper defense built up yet, and he was *so eager* to prove himself beyond being a side–show. I just gave him *the incentive."* Her grip tightens, and her smile is forced, rehearsed. Freddy keeps his grip steady, knowing Vanny is speaking now. "Poor Bonnie didn't stand a chance, not with how easy Monty was to get into. He was getting *too close* to *finding us all out.* And then *you* kept getting in the way. So I tried to deal with you *myself*—but none of them did anything!" She shakes her head, tugging at her ponytail, tangling her fingers in her hair. "And then *he* told me to fix

it, so I did."

"I see." He doesn't—it's as though he is staring into a lake, the water murky and endless, but it's better than nothing. *It was not entirely Monty's fault, and I cannot blame the whole of the incident on him anymore. I cannot blame any of them. I cannot even blame her.* "Is there anything else you need to tell me?"

Vanny tosses her head, considering for a moment, before giggling, soft and sickly sweet. "He knows you're coming for him, Freddy. He thinks you'll be the best out of the bunch for what he wants to do."

"What?"

"You're the strongest." She chimes. "You've always been. He respects something that won't fail him—*a good challenge."*

She goes eerily still, then, blinking rapidly. Vanessa slowly comes back into her body, Vanny pleased enough to leave her be.

Freddy's wires twist. The entire exchange feels like it's been warped, somehow, and Vanessa pulls her hand back like his touch *burns.*

Swallowing, she jerks her head towards the door, conversation over. Freddy acquiesces, only doing so in an effort to ease her pain.

He can only imagine the agony she must be enduring, having to face the remnant in the closet of her mind. His own agony is unquestioned—he lost his friend because he was trying to protect them all from the worst thing imaginable, and was turned to dust because of it.

Sun is eagerly flapping their arms when he slips into the room, the other animatronics turning to face his entrance. Gregory is tentative with his smile, but it is there nonetheless.

"There you are, there!" Sun points at Freddy, giggling. "I was about to start the show without you! Sit, sit, there's plenty of seats!"

Freddy lowers himself to the ground next to Gregory, rubbing a fond hand on the crown of his head. Gregory huffs, but doesn't argue.

"Now that we all are all here," Sun glares at the door, evidently not wishing to wait for their missing audience member, "I shall explain our plan! The basement of the building is not found on any map, and that is for a reason! Although it is unknown exactly *what* is down there, we do have a general idea of the location, along with two points of entry." Sun jabs the largest monitor in the room, doll-like fingers scurrying across the blurry feed of the camera. Freddy recognizes it immediately.

"It's that out-of-order door in Roxy Raceway!" Gregory gasps, sharing his realization. "The one we went through, with the vent, and the fire! Remember?"

"Yes."

"Fire?" Roxy tilts her head, and Gregory gulps, shame burning his face.

"Y-yeah. It's the place where… we ended up after…"

Roxy scoffs. "Yeah, right. Sorry, you mentioned fire and I had to think of two instances tonight where I got *fried."*

"Hush, hush!" Sun puts a finger to their lips, frantically waving. "In any case! It's down *further*. The first point of entry is there—however, I have confirmed that the elevator is in pretty bad condition. It should be good for use—probably!"

Sun then flicks to another part of the map—the lobby.

"The other point of entry is, interestingly, this elevator!" Their bells ring as they wiggle in place. "They have not yet changed the elevator shaft, so it should still have access to the underground—it is connected by two tunnels and a vent, and it seems like it may have been a security office at some point, but neither of us are certain!"

"So how're we going about this?" Monty asks, tilting his head.

"You three go through the atrium to the lobby." Vanessa says from the doorway, arms crossed defensively over her chest. The group jolts except for Freddy, who bows his head instead. "That elevator is larger and can only fit a bit more weight in comparison to the other. Freddy and Gregory will go through the latter."

"Sounds like a plan!" Chica chirps, motors whirring as she stands. Monty tugs his upper body closer to the screen, taking note of the grainy footage of the underground. It's too dim and dreary to function, and there's only two options, neither of which show anything at all. "And he's down there, correct?"

"Yes." Vanessa bobs her head, Roxy rising, padding over to Chica. "He can't do anything physically to you. He's trapped in the recharge station—it's basically a casket for him."

"I see." Freddy pulls himself up, holding his hand out for Gregory to take. "And you two will stay here, I presume?"

"Yup, yup!" Sun twists their head and Moon finally arises, tapping their face. "Officer Vanessa requested us to stay nearby in case of an emergency."

"I don't want to be alone." Vanessa says, voice hushed. Freddy turns to her, the woman tugging her cap over her face. "I don't… trust myself to not let her slip through again, and I don't know what she'll do if she does."

"Comet tail."

Her head snaps up at the nickname, almost gagging from the whiplash.

"You will be alright." Freddy smiles at her, the best he can summon. Gregory shares in it, even if he is more cautious, even if he is still afraid of her. "You are only 19—you have been through a lot in your young life, and you—*both of you*—are stronger than you think."

Vanessa swallows, throat clicking. Her hand finds her security badge, sucking in a deep breath, before she nods, resolute.

"Yes. Thank you."

Freddy nudges his nose against her forehead, then turns to Gregory, who finds her hand and squeezes it. She smiles at him, weary but

grateful, and nods at him.

"We gotta get going now." Gregory says as Freddy opens up his hatch. "Do you need to recharge?"

"Oh. Let me disable that low–power mode." Vanessa leans up and presses a button at the back of Freddy's neck, right underneath the ridge of his plastic casing. Freddy's vision goes dark for a moment as his system recalibrates, his full battery life restored. "There."

"It was a simple button press *this whole time?!"*

"You have not had to touch the back of my head at all, Gregory, and my system scans the fingerprint to see if it is established personnel. If you had tried to do it, well…"

"It probably would have turned him off as a self-defense mechanism." Vanessa snorts. "Sorry, kid."

"Royally unfair."

As Gregory slips into Freddy's hatch, he tugs out the Sunnydrop, Moon grinning as he pops it into his mouth. He recoils at the taste, but chews regardless, needing the extra energy.

"Tastes like medicine!"

"Those candies are mostly made for adults." Says Moon as the hatch shuts, Freddy's fans stirring to life as he adjusts to the familiar weight.

"The ones I make are meant for you little ones."

"I'm pretty sure the stuff they put into those things is illegal," Roxy grumbles, grabbing Freddy by his elbow. When he turns to face her, she gives him a thumbs-up, even if it's more angled at the ceiling than him. "Good luck, spitfire. You're gonna need all of it whenever I'm there to beat him up before you!"

"You got this, papa bear," Monty pats Freddy's foot, winking up at him. "You too, little cub. We'll rock this, all together!"

"We can't do much of anything apart," Chica says, sliding to Freddy's left. "But we can do everything as a group. It's how we were created—we'll be right there with you, don't you worry!"

Freddy blinks back the newfound stinging at the back of his endoskeleton. "Yes. Thank you. All of you."

"Let's go!" Gregory yells, pressing himself to Freddy's warm core. "Let's make him pay!"

There's a tug at Freddy's generator at the words. *Yes. Let us.*

When they reach Roxy Raceway, it resembles more a descent into madness than a descent down a staircase, in Freddy's opinion.

He hated going down here when he grabbed Gregory from the vent, and he hates it now. His boy had gotten a message on his Faz Watch from the terminal closest to the place, describing the cracking of the raceway and how they had discovered something taking up energy supply underground, but that had been when they first came here.

It didn't matter then.

It matters now.

"This is it." Vanessa's voice is slightly garbled over the Faz Watch, but it's clear enough for them both to hear as Gregory steps past the staff-only door. "Just... be careful. She never uses this entrance for a reason."

"I wish the other elevator could handle the weight." Gregory sighs, flicking on his flashlight. The darkness seems to stretch on for eons. "This *sucks."*

"I know, superstar, but this is the best path for the two of us." Freddy breaks the fence keeping them from the rest of the destroyed rubble, carefully surveying the area for any potential dangers. "Vanessa, where exactly is this elevator?"

"It's past another gate." The dark presses around them. It's obvious that this part of the Pizzaplex is underneath enormous strain—the foundation isn't sound, and the ceiling groans at the slightest provocation. "I have to warn you, though—I've never used that elevator before, and I don't know how good the condition of it is."

There's a beam of light against the concrete floor. Gregory follows it, hyped up on his sugar high, and blinks as the elevator erupts from the darkness like a flare.

Freddy peers at it, unimpressed. It's buckling, much like the rest of the place is, and the front door is indented.

Suddenly, a cold chill creeps down his endoskeleton.

That low groaning sounds like a *chorus.*

Clenching his hand in a fist, he barks into the microphone and the gate opens, the doors opening on their own as they encroach upon it.

The tugging that's been stirring in him beckons, as if in open invitation.

"Gregory, I have a… bad feeling." He rasps, looking down at his boy. Based on the stubborn twist of his brow, he's trying his best to keep calm, but his fingers are digging into the bottom of his shirt, and Freddy knows very well that he is afraid. "I do… not want to go down there."

"We have to, don't we?" Gregory swallows. "We have to. He's down there."

The tugging worsens. Its claws wrap around his core, *insistent.*

"I–I know." Freddy's motors hiss in a sigh. "Just... be careful. This elevator does not appear to follow any safety protocols." He blinks, his trepidation worsening. "I do not think it can survive more than one trip."

"Freddy." Gregory's hand grabs Freddy's own, tugging his fingers apart to hold his hand. "I… do you think if we go down there…"

"There is another exit." Freddy frowns, recalling the alternative—an unfinished jumble of a re–route, like this was intended as the only way in, only way out. *A trap.* "We will have to be cautious."

Gregory steels himself, stepping into the elevator. It sags under the weight of him, creaking as Freddy follows.

"We can do this." Gregory whispers. "I have you. I don't have anything to be scared of when you're here."

Except me. Something breathes at the back of Freddy's mind, fighting to the forefront. *You should be very afraid of me.*

He banishes it in an instant.

"Yes. We will be alright."

The elevator doors shut. It crawls down, down, down, deeper into the unknown, all while the speakers spark to life.

The music is haunting. It rumbles, and Gregory gasps at the distortion. Freddy keeps his grip tight, all while the sides screech as they come further and further down.

They cling together when the elevator shudders, lights dimming, finally hitting the bottom. It opens its doors into the yawning abyss, and Freddy blinks as he registers it.

"What…" Gregory. "What… is this place?"

This… Freddy's eyes flit from the dripping ceiling, the cracked floor, generators tucked at every corner, moldy and flickering. The only guidance they have are the strings of lights and the forceful tug in his circuits, deep within him.

Come. A voice calls. *Come to us.*

They step forward together. Each step echoes against the ruins of the cavern. In the cracks, he sees pieces of familiarity—the giant head, staring upwards, the buzzing of the generators, the endoskeletons poised on metal hooks. They don't move, but the place is teeming with life, steam from the pipes billowing around them as they step through the fog.

"Freddy," Vanessa's voice crackles at his temples. "Freddy, are you coming in?"

"Yes, Vanessa. What is it?"

"I don't think this is a good idea." She sucks in a tight breath. "I–I know you both said you wanted to finish this, but—"

"—Vanessa. You want me to remember, yes?"

"Yes. More than anything." He can hear her shuffling on the other line. "But I don't want to get you both hurt. Not at the cost of—of any of this."

There's something moving at the end of the walkway. When the lights flicker above them, Gregory gasps.

There's a sign.

In curved, neon lettering, it says: *Freddy Fazbear's Pizza Place.*

Below it is a single S.T.A.F.F. bot, flashlight in hand, swerving around the area. It's coated in fungus and growth, dead eyes searching the gloom.

"Why is there security down here? And what—is that?!"

Vanessa swallows.

"I want to remember, Vanessa." Freddy says, voice chilled. "Please, allow me to."

Her line goes dead.

Freddy pulls Gregory close to him, eyes glued to the sign as it flickers.

Do you remember us?

He knows this place. Deep inside of him, he knows it.

He steps forward, uncaring of the bot. It stops before them, but no alarm blares. It seems to know why they've come.

Freddy opens the side doors. A light is hanging from the ceiling, but Freddy pushes it out of the way with ease, opening the next set of doors.

He stops when he fully takes it all in.

It's a *location.* It's small, dingy, the metal walls rusted, lights flickering, and reeks of mold. It's *ruined,* arcade cabinets flashing, the curtains moth-eaten and ratty over the rotting planks of the stage, and yet.

And *yet.*

He knows.

Gregory points to the recharge station, out of place, in the corner.

It's new. Fresh. Clean, unlike the rest of the area.

Were they meant to come here? *Who's prepared them to?*

There's the concrete walls, the soft melody over the old speakers, the discarded chairs and tables with checkerboard cloths. There's silverware, and birthday hats, and decorations hang from the ceiling in a sad ridicule of childhood memories. Tarnished by time, but never truly able to escape.

Then there's the pit in the center. It pulls, pulls, pulls at him, like it's ripping at him, prepared to swallow him whole.

"We… were a revived chain." Freddy whispers. "Another cog in the company's machine. It was the four of us—how could I have forgotten?"

Gregory looks up at him. Freddy opens his hatch as they approach the pit, the bear knowing full well the contents within.

His boy steps inside, shielded from it all, while Freddy has no other option but to face it. All of it.

He remembers now, in full. This place was demolished, destroyed, buried underneath; the rotten core of his new world. He remembers it all—every one of his previous incarnations, blinking back at him.

"I know what this is."

The children, he thinks. He remembers the children. The five of them, six, seven, numerous, wrapped into something not meant for them, something foul and rancid and uncontrollable.

"I have been here before."

A man in a yellow rabbit suit, hungry for any kind of vengeance he could get, regardless of who was innocent and who was not. A man who had always played God, and now survived only by doing so. An endless torment, the calls of his family, his friends—he remembers it

all, in perfect clarity, like it has been whispered to him by the walls.

"She brought me here."

Young Vanessa, her hair spun gold, clad like his creator. How familiar that suit is, now that he sees it for all it represents. Dragged by a headset into the unknown, manipulated and used, just as they all had been.

"... I found myself for the first time when I cleared the path."

The ones who shouldn't have had to go. The children he had sworn to protect, for years, decades, *ages.*

"I did not want to, but I had *no choice."*

He was the first. He was the one who began it all. His companion was the one who wanted it all to end, but only so he would no longer have to suffer for the things he's done.

"Now, I have *a choice."*

The pair of them, trapped in an endless loop. The rabbit and the bear, circling around each other, eternally tied in a chase.

"I have changed."

They all breathe together, and as Freddy stares into the pit, Bonnie

stares back.

"My friends… are here."

He isn't surprised to see him. He isn't surprised to see any of them. He remembers this place—he remembers all of it. Bonnie stares, empty-eyed, shriveled and cracked and twisted into this *nightmare.*

"They are so angry… confused…"

His systems shut down, one by one, too overwhelmed by the chaos of this infinite calamity. As they do, he trudges down, heedless, uncaring of the wires wrapping around them, *ravenous.*

Gregory is still inside him. The life of a child, just as innocent, just as deserving of a long time on this earth. Freddy made it his mission when midnight turned to ensure his safety.

He refuses to give in, even as he stumbles into the abyss, even as his body clangs against the depths of the pit.

"But I can protect you."

Can you?

Freddy's vision is overtaken by a dark void, a gate standing in front of him. In it is a door, keyhole gaping, the light green and nauseating in its intensity. There are cracks, worsening with every second, as if the gate is trying to keep him safe from whatever is within.

The gate turns, shaking into place, *faltering.* It swings open with a low groan, *a final plea,* a figure striding from the shadows.

It's a *rabbit.*

It fades in and out of existence, as if it's incapable of touching any mortal realm. The closer it gets, the more it begins to take shape, until he can see the truth of it—it's bright yellow, a pallid thing, lithe and unbothered as it comes closer.

Then, the felt peels, like ribbons of flesh, falling into pieces at his feet as he walks. Stitching is undone, foam tearing asunder, a cocoon of fur and sinew. All that is left is the vague shape of a man—gaunt and sickly purple, eyes staring into his own. His mouth is a chasm, his clothing the same color as the rest of him, his hands coated in red, red, *red,* but those *eyes are* familiar*, burning into him, like twin vengeful infernos.*

"I—"

Nowhere to run. Nowhere to hide.

The man stops. Watches. It's as if he's waiting for something—*his golden opportunity.*

"—AM—"

You should not have come. You know what happens next.

His blood covered palm brushes Freddy's chest, melting into his plastic, into his metal, into the core of his being.

"—NOT—"

No way out.

Freddy grabs his wrist, in a desperate attempt at regaining control, but he has already lost.

—ME."

Freddy's body twitches as the struggling lessens. When he raises his head, he is no longer himself—his ivory gaze is a blinding lavender, glassy and haunting, and they shift as man takes hold of machine.

The hatch opens. Freddy's final order, his last decision before William Afton engulfs the whole of him—Gregory is dumped onto the tile, pale and frightened, shivering as he crawls backwards, sliding against dirt and all things terrible.

Behind him are the bear's three steadfast friends—broken, yes, but not in spirit.

He will remedy that.

Freddy fades, and Afton brightens, flourishing inside the roots of him.

"...a new vessel?" Afton's voice curls around the words, flexing Freddy's claws as he takes stock of his success, jutting up like an obelisk. *"After so long, a body that isn't falling apart!* A shame that dear Bonnie was destroyed before I could infect him, but you, Freddy, will do quite *nicely* in his place."

"Get out of him!" Chica shrieks, standing in front of Gregory protectively. *"He doesn't belong to you!"*

"You've always been quite the negotiator, Chica, but I'm afraid that's not convincing enough." The man laughs as Freddy forces his arm to jerk, clutching onto the offending limb to get it back under control. "A good try, I will give you that; I find it quite amusing you're trying to defend both he and the boy in the state they've left you in."

"If she's not convincing enough, I'm sure I can be." Roxy snarls, ears tilting towards the scrape of metal on metal as Freddy jerks his head, Afton grimacing at the sensation. "How about this—you get out of Freddy, and we handle this properly? Preferably with my *fist* in your *face."*

"That's quite enough." The man snorts derisively, Freddy's eyes darkening to a horrible violet. *Vanessa's lost him,* Gregory thinks, clutching his Fazer Blaster tight. *Freddy, we're gonna get you out of there, I promise!*

"It's three on one!" Monty growls, slamming the floor with his fist. "We can take him, guys! This guy can't stay inside Freddy for long. Not when he's threatening to kill the kid!"

"You know what—you have a point. Until I gain full control, I have a limited time window. You've all been fighting all night—what's one

more brawl?" Afton clenches Freddy's hand in a fist, and shrugs, his smirk warping Freddy's kind features into something *unearthly*. "Let's see what you've got, old friend."

Chica doesn't have any time to react when Afton slams his fist into her face, the chicken screeching as she reels from the hit. Gregory scrambles out of the way, towards Monty, who yells out Chica's name as she falls to the ground.

A growl rises out of Roxy, the wolf charging towards the source of the noise—Gregory gulps as she slashes at Freddy's back, cutting deep lines into the metal. Afton hardly reacts, mildly annoyed at the inconvenience, and his elbow jams into her snout. Roxy shouts when it connects, shaking her head, and Afton takes the opportunity to smash Freddy's knee into her stomach.

She keels over, ugly sparking jumping from the now crumpled plastic, and just as Afton lifts his leg to finish the job, Monty rolls and clamps his jaw over his ankle.

"Damn, you're all quite *annoying,* aren't you?" Afton snarls, waving his leg as Monty clings for dear life. Roxy crawls out of immediate range while he's distracted, still holding her stomach. "You do know the boy is the source of all of this, yes? *He's the reason why you're all destroyed!"*

"No! You are!" Chica pulls herself up, eyes narrowing. Her head swerves as she grabs a fallen light at her feet, throwing it at Afton. The man barely steps out of the way in time, the light clipping Freddy's side, tearing at the plastic. "You're the one who started this whole thing—neither he nor Freddy had a choice!"

"You just don't know when to *quit."* Afton grabs Monty by the top of his snout, wrenching him off of Freddy's leg. He throws him into the

wall unceremoniously, the gator groaning on impact, skittering on the ground. "You'd think you'd learn *before* I even intervened that you don't stand a *chance.* I didn't even need to hack Freddy for the bear to start acting the exact way I needed him to—as *violently as possible."*

"You made us this way!" Monty rasps, jerking as he claws his way up the wall to the vent. "You're the one who—who infected us, and Freddy wasn't about to give up the kid! Especially not when he thought he'd be hurt!"

"It seems you have no comprehension whatsoever." Afton clicks his tongue. "There's a reason why I let things get this far. When Gregory first sent Chica down into the garbage disposal, I was surprised." The man shoves Roxy aside as she attempts to rush at him, fist tearing into her shoulder, sending her sprawling. "A child, fighting back? I've never seen it. They're all so *weak,* so *fragile*—then, I realized the boy's intent—to give Freddy *every advantage he could.*" Chica stumbles into Freddy's foot and tries to claw at his thigh, but Afton just swats her off, like a bothersome fly and not a metal machine. "Besides, he is rather convenient by default, made even more so with these new *perks* —this hatch just so happens to be large enough to carry a child, isn't that right?" Afton taps it with a long claw, stepping closer to the fallen wolf, Chica shakily standing. "With all of these new features, you've turned him into quite the *monster,* haven't you? I'm simply enacting his *true purpose."*

Gregory freezes, face paling.

Monster? *Freddy?*

'True purpose?'

I did this to him, a small voice in the back of his head whispers, *and now he's gonna get me.*

"Freddy would never let you go through with that." Roxy stutters as she clutches her open cavity, body heaving from the strain, her shoulder sparking in tandem. "He'll fight every bit of programming you can try to throw at him. He's the most headstrong one out of the four of us, once you push him past his limits, and *killing children* is *never* going to happen on his watch!"

"Then I'll make sure he has *no say in the matter* when this is all *over."*

As Afton leers over Roxy, Chica rifles through the box of discarded props in the corner, grabbing a guitar with missing strings. With a shriek, she slams it into Freddy's head, Afton growling from the impact. Freddy's ear falls to the ground, tangled wires being the only thing left from the hit. Chica, taking stock of the damage, hesitates *just* long enough for Afton to grab the neck and smash it against hers in return.

Her head spins as she fumbles backwards, eyes rolling in circles. Roxy pounces, clawing at Freddy's legs, slashing at the plastic. Gregory raises his blaster and aims right at his eyes as Afton jerks to grab her, the man howling at the sudden flash of light overloading his systems, stumbling beneath the vent. She jumps back, back hitting the recharge station, ears swerving as Monty jumps and lands onto Freddy's head.

The gator claws at Freddy's eyes, trying to wrench them out of their sockets. Afton screeches and the gator yelps as the noise overrides his system, Afton flinging him aside. Chica throws a desperate punch at his jaw, a resounding crack distorting the voice box long enough for Monty to regain his bearings, lurching in a roll as they both wrestle Afton to the ground.

"You alright?" Roxy calls to Gregory, who's trembling as he aims his gun at Freddy's eyes. "Yeah!" His heart wrenches as he sees flashes of ivory between deep pulses of purple.

"Freddy, come on!" The boy cries out to him. "He's weakening! I know you can do this!"

"No," Afton snaps, grappling against Monty's arms as the gator tries to smash Freddy's head into the ground. "No, I can't allow that to happen —I—*ugh!"*

For one miraculous, wonderful moment, Freddy's eyes light up blue and white, and the struggling stops.

Then he opens his mouth.

"I cannot k-keep—" His voice distorts, head smacking against the tile as it jolts. "—him at bay. Y-you must stop him. No matter what, d-do not—" A horrible screech rises from his throat, ivory blinking, before the purple surges, a feral smile on Freddy's—*Afton's*— lips.

And then, Freddy's hand jumps to smack himself against the jaw, ivory returning.

"D-do not hesitate to *destroy me!"* Freddy gags out. "Do *whatever it takes* to *protect Gregory!"*

"Freddy, we can't do that!" Chica cries. "We can't destroy you! There has to be a better way!"

"H-he will stop at nothing to hurt him," Freddy slurs, meeting Gregory's eyes. "T-they are so loud... I believe they can help!"

"Freddy, what are you talking about?!" Roxy tugs Gregory into her grip, mindful of the sparking. The boy trembles and gulps in deep breaths, trying to control his emotions as he watches his friend fade in and out of Afton's control. "Who's *'they?!'"*

Her answer comes in the form of something sneaking up her leg, the wolf screaming in alarm as she lashes her leg out at it.

Gregory turns his head to look at a—*spindly, metallic wire.* It seems to have a mind of its own, coming from cracks between the tiles, reaching out for *him.*

And then Freddy's ivory dissipates entirely, gone in a flash of light, vivid violet engulfing him.

"You *bastards!"* Afton screeches, the noise deafening. Gregory whines as it makes his ears ring, Chica and Monty faltering. *"Out of my way!"*

Afton surges up, grabbing loose wires hanging from Chica's throat and *tugging.* Chica grabs at his hand, squawking in pure panic, eyes rolling as the damage overwhelms her and she slams against the ground. Monty, in retaliation, tries to claw at Freddy's hatch—it's where the most sensitive parts of his body are—but it doesn't budge, and Afton slams his fist into Monty's snout for his troubles, the bottom half of his jaw snapping off.

Roxy, the only one left standing, and the only one incapable of sight, growls as her remaining hair ruffles up.

"Gregory, run!" She barks, claws unsheathing, the arch of her body warped. *She can't do anything,* Gregory thinks numbly. *None of them*

can. None of this is an equal fight. "Just *run!"*

Gregory stumbles as he slips into the nearest doorway, duffle clattering against the ground, the only thing keeping him grounded being the red light from the blaster.

This is my fault, he thinks. *I made Freddy like this, destroyed the others, and Afton's taken advantage of it.*

He listens to Roxy's clash against Afton as he retreats. It doesn't last long—with her high whine, he hears her body crash against the ground, and a hush falls over them all.

Gregory taps desperately at his Faz Watch. Vanessa answers immediately.

"He's too strong." Vanessa lets a sob escape her, clacking against her keyboard, frazzled and afraid. "Freddy's trying his best, and I *know* the backdoor is somewhere in this line of code, but it's in a cipher I can't figure out—"

"Okay." Gregory whimpers, hands shaking as he backs further into the dark. "Okay, Vanessa. I'll try to buy us more time."

Before Vanessa can reply, he shuts off his watch, then his laser, and melds with the shadows.

He's done this before. He's done this so many times it comes naturally to him, muscle memory moving his every step as he listens. It's quiet, and it seems Afton is deliberately hovering, not moving into the hallway yet.

When Gregory's back hits the door, he sucks in a tight breath, daring a glance around the entryway.

No button.

He's backed into a corner.

Nowhere left to go, boy.

Beyond the roar of blood in his ears, there's a scraping against the wall.

It's slow, at first. Rhythmic, even. Gregory wills his breath to slow, no matter how much panic overtakes his limbs. It's like a jaunty tune, distorted by too many retapings, slicing against his sanity as the dark hugs him tight.

The door opens. The meek light from the room leaks only near the doorway. He makes out his eyes first—black sclerae, violet irises, red pupils, dark smears still coating his cheeks—and then his full silhouette.

Gregory has never been scared by Freddy. He hadn't even been scared of him when he had first tugged him from the safety of his hatch, leering in too close to his face to properly scan him. Not a single time has Freddy, even when Gregory has seen him pushed to his limits, been scary.

Afton makes Freddy downright *petrifying.*

His damage is awful. Parts of his arms are nothing but endoskeleton, the casing broken off or sliced away. His jaw, unhinged, hangs low, like a snake's, teeth gleaming in the low light. His long claws tap against the wall, sliding just enough to make a rasp of metal against metal. The rest of him is too coated in dirt to make out, smudged at the corners.

"There you are." Afton's distorted Freddy's voice, too; it's lower now, even lower than Freddy's, and static follows his every word as he drawls. "I was wondering where you had gone. Such a shame that you've run off, little Gregory."

The boy clicks his blaster back on, knowing what little cover he had is completely blown.

If he's going to die here, to the only stable parental figure he's ever had, *he's going to fight back.*

When he aims, the red light right between his eyes, he presses the trigger.

All he's met with is a terrible, *horrible* clicking, and Afton's hearty chuckle.

"You look so much like him," Afton coos, Gregory's hands shaking as he tugs on the trigger, tears in his eyes as the gun beeps a negative tone. "But you're far more cruel than he ever was. My dear son would never have done the things you have."

"Shut up!" Gregory screams. "Leave me alone!"

"You just proved my point." Afton laughs, closing in. "You look so much like him, but act so much more like his *older brother."* His voice drops another octave, like a death knell. "I couldn't ever kill him."

He stares down at the tiny boy trembling, just like all the others had.

"But I can *kill you."*

Gregory whimpers, eyeing his duffle on the other end of the hallway. If he can just get his camera—

—Afton slams his foot into the ground, blocking the way, forcing Gregory to stay right where he is.

"Oh, I'm going to *enjoy* this." Afton grins, twisted and maniacal. "And we have an audience! I've always had to keep myself in check before, with so many eyes on my *every move,* but now?" He leans closer, ghostly breath escaping Freddy's mouth, teeth glinting as he bares them. "Now, I can take my *time,* all while your dear *papa bear* watches, unable to do a *thing* as *his own body* tears you to tiny little *pieces."*

Gregory stares into those purple eyes, swirling and twisting, like burning phantoms, dancing in tandem.

Then, Freddy's jaw clacks shut, pure fury bubbling over his expression, the twist of his face achingly familiar.

He's still trying to protect me.

"Got it!" Vanessa's voice is muffled as he watches the light begin to shift, ivory and violet again warring with each other. The screech Freddy lets out rattles in his ears and bounces off the walls, Gregory slapping his palms over them.

Gregory lets out a soft breath, bolting from one end of the hallway to the other, clutching his duffle the moment the strap is in his hands.

"You *saboteur!"* Afton roars, fist connecting with the wall where Gregory's head had been. "I should have thrown you out the *moment* you couldn't kill the first child, much less spare you so many chances!"

"We're not you!" Vanessa barks. "I'm not scared of disobeying you anymore! *Get out of Freddy!"*

"This is what happens when you don't do something yourself." Afton rolls his eyes, flexing his hand. "Fine, then. Once I kill this *brat,* I'll find you, little rabbit, and *slice you both open to match!"*

Afton gives chase.

Freddy's feet slam against the battered tile, the whole room shuddering, the other animatronics' suffering as power surges short-circuit their components. Gregory screams as he tugs out his camera, clicking it the moment Afton comes around the corner.

"Fuck!" Afton curses, clamping his paws over his eyes. "Damn *fucking* thing—"

"Gregory!" Vanessa interrupts, uncaring of the man writhing in pain, his spasming hiking up as a roar rips from the animatronic the man is trying to command. Gregory gasps as Freddy rips at his own hatch, metal crashing against the ground as the front plate falls off.

He's so desperate to keep Afton from hurting him that he's trying to cut his own lifeline.

"—there! The monitor! I've enabled the button!"

"What?!" Gregory's head snaps to it, the monitor glowing with purple light. He can see the faint outline of *something* in a recharge station, too overwhelmed to make it out. "What do I do?!"

"Hit it!" Vanessa cracks her hand against her desk. "The vents underneath him are a prime fire safety hazard! It'll make them get flooded with activity, and *it'll set him on fire!"*

Afton groans as he blinks, realization dawning on his features.

Freddy's overriding his authority, body freezing, every spasm keeping him stuck in place as Afton tries to prevent Freddy from shutting himself down.

He can do nothing as Gregory leans over the desk, arm outstretched.

There's a split second that passes between them, when they lock eyes.

He sees Freddy in them. A gentle kindness, a warmth in the core of his

being, a caretaker he did not believe he would ever have, much less deserve. An unexpected guardian, made of metal and plastic, who Gregory can't imagine living without.

He also sees a pathetic man, driven only by spite in pursuit of the living. A meaningless, endless circle of violence and carnage, and for what? For the loss of his own children? To make an example of innocence? Or does he stand for nothing at all?

Gregory sees death, and life, both in places they do not belong.

Somehow, he is not afraid. He knows who is going to prevail.

Gregory slams his fist on the button underneath the center monitor, and flames engulf the screen.

Afton's wail does not belong to any realm except the darkest, deepest pits of hell. Freddy's body lurches as Afton claws at his own face, body jittering, his vessel finished gathering his strength to rebel.

The purple is wiped clear. In its place is a familiar white and blue.

Freddy's paws snap away from his face, his body rattling as the last of Afton's possession leaves him.

"Freddy!"

"Gregory," Freddy creaks, falling to his knees. His body jerks as he slumps over, head rolling.

"Freddy!"

Gregory scrambles to his protector, tugging his head up with his hands. He's cracked, and splintered, and yet he still fights to function, his backup generator fueling him.

"Gregory," Freddy closes his eyes, leaning into his cub's touch, twitching as he regains full control. *"Superstar."*

His boy chokes on his tears, cradling him as well as he is able. Freddy's systems whirr, alerts rolling across his vision.

To his left, Chica jolts up, head stuck in place as she swerves. To his right, Roxy staggers as she rises, a relieved laugh leaving her. In front of him, Monty crawls feebly, a smile crooking what's left of his jaw.

His friends are safe. His boy is safe.

He isn't finished.

The wires have gathered around the floor, sliding against the ceiling. Freddy pulls Gregory to him, curling around him.

He needs to complete his mission.

They're here. He hears them, whispers and screams and desperate begging. They're a hoard, stuck forcefully together, all writhing in

their infinite torment.

Help us, they say, *and we shall let you go free.*

He knows what they want.

Freddy drags it from the depths of his programming—a figment, a memory, a testament to his existence.

It is a song.

Showtime.

Soft, gentle notes flow from him, the melody nostalgic. The amalgamation ceases its movement, Freddy's eyes and mouth glowing as his memory recites it.

A reminder.

They are always fighting their old enemy, it seems. A constant threat, looming on the horizon. He is doomed to forever shift his form. If not him, a shell of him, a specter.

And so Freddy plays the Toreador's March, weaving their tale, a plea to all of his lost friends to remember.

A call.

The animatronics witness, in stunned silence, as the metal limbs of the heaving creature spin in the air, flexing and pulling the room apart. Faces meld together in a blur, save for the familiar lilac of Freddy's best friend, all dancing to his music. It floods against their chosen stage, picking it to pieces, Freddy hugging Gregory close as the cold metallics lick at their feet.

The only solace any of them have is the soft music box melody and the light shining through Freddy's eyes and throat, notes feather light as the bull charges forward, the toreador against impossible odds, only for them to evade, time and time again.

Afton bellows, a deep, rumbling sound that rattles the floor and ceiling. The lights dim as more and more of the final remnants seize him. The head at the top of the pile—*it's me, isn't it*, he thinks, *it's a version of me*—roars in triumph.

Gregory looks up at Freddy. His eyes are wide with childish wonder, uncharacteristic of a boy so frightened, so lonely, so brave.

Gregory *smiles.*

Freddy had wondered if he was special. If he was art. If he could be easily replaced. If all that he had to give to the beings he had sworn to protect was a few balloons and a song.

If he was capable of the one thing a machine, no matter how intelligent, no matter how close to sentience, was incapable of feeling.

Love.

Freddy doesn't need to wonder about those things any longer.

Freddy picks him up, the strength of his notes as powerful as his *love* for his friends, Vanessa, and Gregory, pushing forward, past the wires, past the pain, past ground that has been walked before him.

His friends hear his song. Chica, Roxy and Monty all follow his chimes through the forest of machinery and irreparable damage. His eyes and throat are a guiding light, his song a gift.

They walk this stairway, made of molten wires and various wonders, up the hole in the floor, past the decayed location, beyond shimmering stars and shiny ornaments and all things once thought splendid.

Afton screams as the flames finally catch up with him, all while the toreador's red flag wraps the bull in its embrace.

Past the ashes, past the smoke, past it all, the wires begin to lessen until the floor is clear and the elevator doors open, like a welcome of a long-awaited friend.

They all huddle inside. They watch as Afton disappears into a sea of metal and faces, his own creations weighing their judgment.

The doors shut. The emergency doors to the underground location shut, too, keeping the fire contained.

Vanessa's voice trembles over the watch's line.

"It's going to send you up."

As the elevator box shifts at a strange angle, and yet pushes upward, the last few notes ring out from Freddy's voice box, until there is no more song to sing.

When the doors open, they've arrived at the lobby's elevator door, having been twisted and turned as to fit, all five of them carefully stepping out. They watch the tendrils curl around the doors to shut them, the elevator moving down as they turn around.

Vanessa and Sun are there. Vanessa's fear is gone, her face dimpling with her wide grin, mirroring Sun's constant one.

"I can't believe that worked." She breathes.

"I cannot believe it, either," Freddy rasps, voice tight, Gregory putting his head on his chest. "I—I have a great deal of apologies to make, now that the matter is handled, yes?"

"Consider me biting your legs and crashing on you as us being even," Monty grunts, crawling past them to be able to stare both Freddy and Gregory in the eye. "As for my apology, I'm sorry, kiddo. You didn't deserve to get any kinda foul treatment from me, and while Freddy could have been a bit more *delicate,* I can't get too mad." He shrugs. "If it were me, and he was attacking my kid? I woulda done worse."

"I only have to get some work done," Roxy grumbles, managing to jab Freddy lightly with her elbow. He smiles at her smirk. "Totally ruined my hair, though, which I'm *never* gonna forgive you for."

She squats down, listening intently as she leans in towards Gregory, taking a cursory sniff. She smiles. "There you are. I am terribly sorry about trying to make a meal out of you, pup."

"It's okay," Gregory laughs as she puts her snout to his nose, her ears flicking. "I was more worried about Freddy eating *you."*

"I wouldn't have let him do that!" Roxy guffaws, hands on her hips. "Besides, he can be a little bit mean, but you're in a league of your own! I'm gonna have to bring my a-game next time if I'm gonna win any brutality awards."

"Oh, Roxanne, let's not encourage that competition." Chica chimes in, eyes sliding as she does her best attempt at a smile. "I'm sorry too, Gregory. I can only imagine how frightened you must have been. Is there any way I can make up for it?"

"Chica, it's okay." Gregory bows his head. "I'm sorry for shoving you in a trash compactor. You didn't deserve that."

"And you didn't deserve us trying to hurt you, chickadee." Chica ruffles her hair, processing. "I have an idea! I think we ought to make sure Gregory is taken care of when he leaves, yes? I'll make sure to pack him as much pizza as he wants!"

Gregory swallows. Freddy puts a hand on his shoulder, and clicks his throat.

"About leaving..."

His tone gathers all their attention.

"I am... going, too."

Chica is the first to react, a meek squawk escaping her. Monty seems the least surprised, rolling his eyes at the news. Roxy tilts her head, jaw falling open.

Vanessa lets out a soft sigh. Her expression tells him she already knew he was going to say that.

"Leaving?" Sun puts their hands to their mouth. "Oh, wow, wow, wow! Mister Fazbear, are you certain?"

"Yes." Freddy's hand finds Gregory's, rubbing a thumb against his knuckles. His boy's lip wobbles, eyes shining with surprise. "I am afraid that I would not be happy here any longer. It is not a matter of your company—I hold no grudges towards your behavior. It was out of your control, and I had a role in it, too." He braces a hand against his chest, ear flicking. "However, once I am suitable enough to leave, after a few repairs, I will be going with Gregory. He is..."

Freddy shuts his eyes, and focuses on the warmth of Gregory's small fingers wrapped in his own.

"... he is now in my care, for as long as I can exist to do so."

"So you've adopted him?" Roxy clicks her tongue, Monty shaking with laughter as she gets straight to the heart of his intent. Gregory squirms, puffing his cheeks, and Freddy fumbles, suddenly bashful.

"You *have!"* Monty's laughs worsen as Freddy glares at him, willing him to be quiet.

"Oh, Freddy." Chica hums thoughtfully, shaking her head. "I always knew you were going to end up doing something like this."

"It—" Freddy's motors hiss as he tries to collect himself, but between Monty's incessant laughter, Roxy's snickering, and Chica's knowing gaze, he can't. "—is the truth. Yes. I suppose I have done that."

He can see Gregory's small smile in the corner of his eye, and he looks up at Vanessa, who shares it, too.

"And he is not the only one, it seems." Chica presses a finger to her chin, tutting. "You've gotten quite busy, Fred!"

"Please." Freddy groans, head rolling as Monty's laughter edges into hysterics. "You all have done *quite enough* tonight—must you do this to me as well?"

Sun claps their hands, bursting into a giggling fit. "It seems like neither of your *cubs* mind the teasing too much!"

"That's because it's funny watching Freddy react." Vanessa says, eyes crinkling with mirth. "He doesn't have a poker face at *all."*

Freddy's ear flattens against his head, Gregory joining on with a soft giggle of his own.

"You all are horrible to me. Horrible."

"No, but seriously," Monty wheezes, shaking off the last of his laughter. "You're actually going? As in, leaving the Pizzaplex?"

Freddy nods, resolute. The others see his shift in expression, and Roxy lets out a huff.

"You won't last without power, not for long. Maybe a day or two, *max."*

"Maybe there's another way for him to recharge." Chica ruffles at her hair, thinking. "Remember when Monty was having that technical issue where the stations wouldn't work, so they hooked him up to a car battery?"

"That's true." Monty gruffs. "If you are gonna hit the road, there's plenty of vans in the back that'll work. They're security ones, too, and I know from experience they do a better job than any of those older vans. They're almost as old as *you,* Fazbear."

Vanessa frowns, a sigh escaping her. "Regardless, we have to get going. It's nearly 8 now, and even if we're not opening today, my shift ends then."

"How're we going to explain—" Roxy gestures to the whole of her, and then flicks her ear in Freddy's direction. "—all of this? Including Freddy just *disappearing?"*

"Ooh! What about a break-in?" Sun jitters, swinging their arms wildly. "A mastermind thief came in, then *whack, pow, kick,* he damaged you all because you were trying to protect Mister Fazbear!"

"Or maybe Monty just got really violent," Roxy chimes, grinning. "And Freddy had enough, and Chica and I kept trying to stop them, and then we all dumped Freddy out back to get rid of the evidence!"

"I'm not *that* bad," Monty mumbles. "What about vandalism? Somebody that hates the company, decided to teach the staff a lesson, and caused a whole bunch of property damage!"

"Have we considered just sticking closer to the truth?" Chica intervenes, wagging a finger. "We glitched, just like Freddy did, except when we glitched, we got violent. A kid got stranded, and, well." She looks over at Freddy, and her face scrunches up. "He... did his best."

"Let's go with that," Vanessa rubs at her temples, looking over the six of them. "They're gonna have my ass for this... but I don't even care if I get fired anymore. If they *don't* fire me, I'm giving them my two week's notice, and getting the *hell* out of here."

"Agreed." Freddy smiles down at Gregory, who has watched this encounter, contemplative. "What do you think, Gregory?"

"I'm just..." He bows his head, and shifts his weight. "I'm just glad you're actually coming with us—with *me."*

"Of course I am." Freddy urges the boy to walk with him as the others begin following Vanessa to Parts and Service. "I will not be parted from your side, even when I am overcome with rust and fatigue."

Gregory beams, missing baby teeth exposed, a full smile that lightens his face and makes Freddy's motors purr in contentment.

"Really?"

"Yes." Freddy nudges his nose against his cub's forehead. "Really."

"You promise?"

"Pinkie swear."

Gregory laughs, pulling his pinkie out. Freddy wraps it around his own.

"I'll hold you to that!"

It isn't too long after when Freddy, Vanessa and Gregory stand in front of the entrance.

The sun has risen on a new day, peeking past the shutters as they rise. Chica, Monty, Roxy and Sun all wave their goodbyes behind them, Freddy raising his arm in his own farewell.

"Stay safe!" Freddy exclaims, Gregory snorting at his stern expression. "Do not do anything I would not do! And—"

"—we know, Freddy!" Roxy sputters. "Go!"

"Take care of yourselves!" Monty calls. "Don't be dumb, you hear?"

"We'll miss you!" Chica squawks. "Be careful on your trip!"

"Goodbye, friends!" Sun cries, wiping at their mask as Moon shifts to take their place. "Goodbye, too! Goodbye, goodbye!"

Gregory, after a moment's consideration, waves his own hand as Vanessa opens the doors, and they step out into the open. Freddy laughs, elated, Vanessa smiles, relieved, and Gregory sighs, satisfied.

"They're making Monty the main star of the show, you know."

"Somehow that does not surprise me." Freddy leans over a stovetop, carefully moving his head, not wanting to hit the kitchen hood. He salts the eggs, scrambling them with a spatula. "I am sure he is thrilled that the location may be themed after him."

"I'm sure it's getting to his head." Gregory snarks, shoveling cereal in his mouth as he speaks. "I can't believe they're making Mr. Hippo replace Freddy! Why not just make a new casing?"

"It's likely because they think they're gonna find him." Vanessa pinches her brow, putting the newspaper down, nodding her thanks to Freddy as he places her finished plate on the table. He stands, watching over them, ears flicking as she narrows her eyes at the boy across from her. "And no talking with your mouth open! It's gross!"

"You're gross!" Gregory mocks, jabbing his spoon at her.

"Someone woke up on the wrong side of the bed this morning," Freddy soothes, stretching a hand to brush through Gregory's hair. The boy leans into his touch, despite himself, cheeks puffing.

"Someone is mad about having to catch up on the curriculum." Vanessa sighs. "You were out of school for over a year, kid. We have to get you up to speed so you don't fall behind even more."

"School sucks!"

"I know it sucks, but you still have to do it." Vanessa laughs as Gregory sticks out his tongue. "It'll help me get closer to actually adopting you. I'm still worried about the background check, though."

"Do not worry, comet tail," Freddy's voice is soft, moving his hand from Gregory's head to hers, gently pulling a strand of hair behind her ear. "I am sure all will be well."

"As long as we keep you in the garage, at least." Vanessa sighs, wiping her chin with a napkin. "You can't keep poking your head where the windows are, Freddy. Our neighbor has two girls, and if they see you, they're gonna *freak out."*

"It is in my nature to be curious," Freddy admits, grabbing Vanessa's plate when she finishes. She opens her mouth to tell him she can do it herself, and shuts it, realizing Freddy isn't going to let her do it, anyway. "And I believe those two would make excellent friends for our Gregory."

"They're scared of me." His boy rolls his eyes.

"Last time you saw them, you doused them with a water gun."

"They were in their swimsuits!" Gregory huffs. "I figured they'd get wet, anyway, so why not speed up the process!"

"You're a public menace."

"Well, you're stupid."

"Hey!"

Freddy chuckles as the two jab at each other, putting the plate in the sink. He pulls behind the curtain to peek into the yard, smiling softly as he sees twin rabbits huddled underneath a tree, one brown and one white, grooming each other.

Although he misses his friends, and is sad to see that he has been shifted out, he can't be too upset. Not when he has Vanessa and Gregory to fret over, come dusk or dawn, who always return to him.

How happy he is, to have these two in his life.

After so long of wanting connections like this, a fragile thing that always seemed out of his grasp, he finally has it in them.

He knows not all is well. Gregory and Vanessa both struggle from night terrors. Sometimes, Vanessa looks straight through him, pale and shivering. Sometimes, when Gregory sees him in the dark, he whimpers. Both struggle with having to get to know one another, and for them not to be afraid of what the other is capable of doing, but it is slow and steady progress.

He knows to hope for the best. He knows that, with every step down the road to recovery, his two children will return to themselves.

"Freddy!"

He turns around, smiling at Gregory in the doorway, the boy holding up a notepad.

"Help me with my homework?"

"Of course, superstar."

"You better not be using Freddy as a cheat sheet again!"

"I'm not, Vanessa! Promise!"

Freddy laughs. How domestic he has become.

He does not mind in the slightest.

Chapter End Notes

hi everybody. i honestly have no clue how to like... put this, other

than, WOW, thank you all for your support and your interest into this weird thing i did. i've never really been a part of a community before, much less one as friendly as this one turned out to be, and as someone who was into fnaf when i was a kid and is returning to it, like many other people have, because of this game, well. i'm glad i decided to post

as for other projects, i have some stuff planned. considering the last thing i was into lasted for a year and a half before i moved onto this, and that security breach is going to be receiving support from steel wool, i figured i might as well be in it for the long haul.

i have a twitter now so if you want to follow to get updates on stuff, to see sneak peeks, or my thoughts on things, the link is there for you. my college semester just started this week, though, so i may not be around as frequently as i have been, but i'll still be here!

also one last thing. collu "sus". you're welcome

Please drop by the Archive and comment to let the creator know if you enjoyed their work!